ADAM LINK, *Champion Athlete* by EANDO BINDER

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AMAZING STORIES

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WHEN THE GODS MAKE WAR
by A. R. STEBER

6 COMPLETE SCIENCE STORIES

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AMAZING STORIES

VOLUME 14
NUMBER 7

JULY
1940

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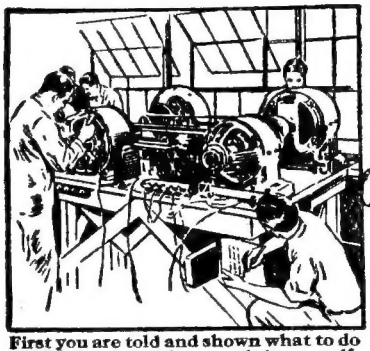

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Front cover painting by Robert Fuqua, depicting a scene from "When The Gods Make War"
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul
Illustrations by Robert Fuqua, Jay Jackson, Frank R. Paul, Julian S. Krupa, Joe Sewell, Will Panak, R. Newman, Guy Gifford

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Volume XIV
Number 7

The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

WHEN your editor hit upon the idea for the Story Contest in our May issue, he thought it was a good one. Now, after wading through the pile of entries, he doesn't think it was such a good idea after all—*because he hates work.*

After this, time will be a taboo subject with him. Lord, what you readers didn't do to that infamous invention of theorists. We don't even believe in such a thing as time any more. In fact, we've thrown our watches out the 22nd story window of our office—and good riddance!

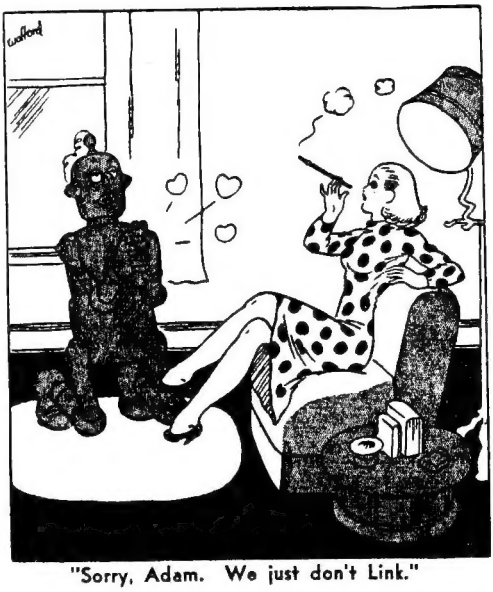
Anyway you'll find the prize winners announced on page 128 of this issue. And are we glad it's over!

WHICH brings us to another contest which we have been holding open until the final results have all rolled in. That contest is our now discarded monthly merit award.

The winning author for the March issue of *Amazing Stories* was A. W. Bernal with his "Paul Revere And The Time Machine." He gets $50.00 for his excellent work in turning out a yarn that really caught the readers' eye. It ranked second only to our ineligible serial, "Black World," by Alfred R. Steber.

The reader award for the same issue, which was the front cover painting by H. W. McCauley, handsomely framed, has been sent to most-astute-selecter, and best-letter-writer, John Kerchefsky, Jr., 181 Arizona Ave., Shenandoah Heights, Pennsylvania.

Congratulations to you both. It was fine work all around, and personally, we envy Mr. Kerchefsky. That painting really looked elegant in its frame. It'll look *better* in your den, John!



"Sorry, Adam. We just don't Link."

LOTS of things have been happening in the world, but perhaps most interesting to us is the strange coincidence (or was it coincidence?) of the severe rash of sunspots that afflicted our solar parent two days after the appearance of our true story of the Sun Giants of Peru. Maybe some of the peculiar things that observers have seen in that hinterland are still going on. Anyway, it's interesting to speculate just how much truth there is in the stories that persist in emanating from Peru. Maybe Peter Horn will tell us more in another issue, if Mr. X has any theories or experiences.

THE amazing college craze for swallowing contests is definitely over! If you remember, it got up to the point where the new champion had to swallow a salamander to win his crown. Beginning now, nobody is ever going to repeat *that* stunt.

But why not swallow salamanders? you ask. Are they any harder to gulp down than goldfish or photograph records?

No, but the females of one species of salamander, *Tritutus torosus,* have just been found by scientists to contain a poison so virulent that one ounce is enough to kill 588 people!

And it was a *Triturus* that was swallowed by the Stanford University student who now holds the title—though of course it must have been a male or he wouldn't still be with us. *But can YOU tell a male salamander from a female?*

We can't—and we're still betting that the S. U. boy is going to *stay* champ!

HERE'S a question our science quiz doesn't ask: What's the best thing in the world for

(Concluded on page 27)

When the Gods Make WAR

"It is a devil-bird!" cried Jan, crouching against the rock. "It has come to kill us!"

by A. R. Steber

JOHN BRUCE faced an incredible mystery in the Valley of Fools when time slipped a cog and his plane crashed in a future world where America was only a dimly remembered legend

"I AM going to kill you, Jan Lee, but before I send forth the lightning of the fire-club, get down on your knees and say: 'Davin is my master.' Down, you yellow dog—down on your knees . . . !"

Jan Lee's youthful face went white, but it was not with fear. He drew his slim body erect.

"Kill me as I stand, Davin, for never will I kneel to such as you. And may the curse of the Talking God be on your head!"

Red rage flared in the face of Davin, and he thrust his burly shoulders forward menacingly.

"Then die, you fool," he snarled, leveling the weapon in his hand, "but know as my lightning strikes that before long, all men will kneel to Davin. I say it will be so, as surely as I have been to the Valley of Fools . . ."

"Only a fool would go to the Valley of Fools," interrupted Jan Lee coldly.

"None has ever gone there and lived long to boast."

"None but myself," rasped Davin. "And I do not boast. Not even the Talking God—if ever he talks!—could tell of the things I have found there. Of the power that will be mine when I return again!"

"If the valley can give you so much power, then why do you need me to return there?" questioned Jan Lee scathingly.

"Why does a man need a mule?" retorted Davin with a sneer. "To carry his burdens for him. And what does a man do when his mule proves useless because it is stubborn?" He lifted his weapon swiftly.

"This!" he snarled.

The swift rush of feet delayed his purpose. In an instant a flying form catapulted between the two men, and a breathless girl flung her body protectingly before that of Jan Lee.

"Kill him," she panted, "and you kill me too, Davin!"

Davin lowered his weapon momentarily as his startled gaze rested on the girl. As she stood protectingly before Jan Lee, her coppery hair tumbling about her shoulders, to partly cover the golden nudity of her sun-bronzed shoulders, she made a lovely picture. Her forehead gleamed with the sweat of exertion, and her slim body heaved with her panting breath.

Davin's eyes roved over the well-fashioned skin garment that draped her form, and on down to the slim, firm legs, braced now in a protecting pose on the rocky ground. He leered.

Then: "Move aside, Betty Lee," he said savagely, lifting his weapon again.

"I will not," the girl said firmly, defiantly, her blue eyes flashing. "And you won't use the fire-club, because you do not want me dead."

"No," said Davin, taking a step forward. "I don't want you—dead!"

Abruptly he leaped forward, grasped Betty Lee's slim wrist with one vicious motion, tore her away from the man she shielded, and flung her to the ground to one side.

"Now," he ground out, "you die, Jan Lee!"

But at that instant there came a peculiar sound; a sound as of a giant ripping a huge piece of cloth in the sky. It was followed immediately by a drumming roar that echoed from the hillside. There came the rush of wind, and the scream of protesting metal scorching through the air.

Davin whirled to stare upward, his jaw falling open at what he saw. Into his eyes came incredulity, realization —and fear!

"A flying demon!" gasped Jan Lee. "It is a bird out of hell . . ."

Betty Lee shrank back against the body of her brother, still in her protecting pose. There was awe in her eyes as she looked up.

"It—it is falling upon us!" she cried. "May Mak-r-Thee protect us."

THE thing in the sky wobbled crazily. Its tail seemed shimmering, hidden in a mist, a mist from which emanated that strange, terrifying sound of tearing cloth. Then abruptly the mist was gone, the metal bird became completely visible, and it zoomed down toward the earth, roaring.

As it came, Betty saw that it was not a bird at all. It was no living thing—*but it had a living thing in it!* Through windows at its side, where its gleaming wing joined its body, Betty saw the figure of—*a man!* He was wrestling desperately with something before him.

The metal bird leveled out, its roaring stopped, and it slanted toward the hillside, veered crazily, then pancaked

down with a terrific crash. Clouds of dust obscured the splintered ruin.

In the silence that descended, Betty Lee's awed whisper sounded very loud.

"The man," she whispered. "He is—maybe he is badly hurt. We must help him."

Davin, standing there with that dazed, unbelieving, yet convinced attitude of fear, growled with returning courage. "One of the Sleepers!" he muttered. "Out of the Valley of Fools. "Stay!" he snapped, as Betty started forward. "There may be danger . . ."

He himself advanced slowly. Betty and her brother followed. As they neared the wrecked metal bird, they saw the figure of the man who had been in it, lying on the ground. He was dressed in a strange suit of white, with odd leather straps about his body, and his head was covered by a white helmet, almost torn away now, revealing tumbling, curly brown hair that was stained with blood. He moaned and stirred.

"He lives!" exclaimed Betty, darting forward. She reached the prone form and dropped to her knees. Lifting the brown head to her lap, she smoothed back the hair and stared at the youthful, handsome features.

"He is like us! And he is—beautiful!" she finished.

And at the last word, the man's eyes opened, stared up into hers. She saw that they were blue, and honest, and although filled with mystification now, they still smiled at her.

"That's the first time I've ever been called that," he said weakly. "And if I can repay the compliment, you're not so bad yourself, sister."

He struggled to a sitting position, wincing with pain, and stifling another groan.

"Wow! I sure banged myself up . . . and the mail won't be delivered tonight." He looked ruefully at the battered wreck on the hillside. "What a washout!"

He turned to stare up at the frowning, puzzled, half-fearful face of Davin, and glanced at Jan, who was fingering a piece of metal fuselage with awe.

"Who are you people?" he demanded abruptly. "And this place . . . where is it? What the hell has happened to me, anyway? This p l a c e —" he scratched his head in growing bafflement. "—there was nothing like it below me when I hit that pocket. All I know is, I was flying the mail from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles when, *zowie!* I hit an air pocket, the bottom drops out, somebody starts tearing the bedsheets, and I wind up—here!"

"I do not understand," faltered Betty. "Salt Lake City . . . Los Ange—" She stumbled over the word. "There is no place like that."

"NO place . . ." The aviator clambered to his feet, weaving unsteadily. "What's that again, sister? No place like—an' say, you talk funny! Slur all your words like I never heard before; at least, not in California."

Davin broke in abruptly, accusingly. "You come from the Valley of Fools," he stated. "You are a Sleeper . . ."

The aviator stiffened, doubled his fists. "Who you calling a fool?" he began pugnaciously. "An' nobody pulls any sleeper gags on John Bruce . . . or on the U. S. Air Mail, get me? What's the joke?"

Davin stepped back, startled. He lifted his weapon protectingly. John Bruce whipped an automatic from his knee pocket with one deft flip.

"One move, hillbilly," he snapped, "and I'll plug you. Good thing I carry this thing in my pocket, against regulations. Now, start explaining, and fast. You're up against Uncle Sam."

"It is for Mak-r-Thee and his priests to explain, not for Davin," said Betty Lee abruptly, trying to avoid the impending clash. "Come, we will take you to them."

"Mak-r-Thee?" floundered Bruce. "Sounds like an Irishman. Who . . . ?"

"Mak-r-Thee is the Talking God," said Betty reverently. "I do not know what an Irishman is, but perhaps some day the Talking God will talk, and perhaps he will tell us. The priests say that some day the God *will* talk." She half turned and cast a defiant glance at Davin, who scowled.

Bruce gaped. "What's all this damned nonsense?" he demanded. "Has all of California gone nuts, or am I still batty from the crack-up? But if I'll get any sensible answer out of this, lead on to your Talking God, and let me have a word with him."

With a toss of her head at Davin, who was obviously unsure of himself, and a covert glance once more at the handsome birdman, Betty led the way down the rocky path. But before he followed, Bruce retrieved the two mail sacks from the wrecked plane. He slung one over his shoulder and Jan Lee took the other, eager to be helpful.

John Bruce's brow wrinkled with a frown as he strode along, stumbling frequently when a twinge of pain shot through his shaken body. He stared long at the oddly barren landscape about him, at the deserted sky above, and at his strange, half-primitive companions.

Only the one with the rifle seemed most civilized, but Bruce was sure the man couldn't be trusted. And somehow, he looked incongruous in his rough, tanned-leather clothes, carrying the rifle so clumsily, as though he was unaccustomed to having such a weapon. And there was something about the gun, too. Bruce eyed it sharply. Must be the latest type, in spite of odd rusty spots on it. It was a veritable marvel of perfection. He'd seen an exhibition of latest army weapons just two weeks ago, and this was a distinct advance over the best in that display. The army certainly worked fast on these new guns—

The army! What was this half-savage hillbilly doing with an army gun?

Suddenly Bruce halted, waited for Davin to reach his side, then stared at the rifle. There, on the stock, was the insignia of the United States Army! It *was* an army gun!

"Where'd you get that rifle?" he demanded.

Davin looked at him peculiarly. The odd attitude of fear was dissipating now, and was being replaced by a cunning, calculating look.

"I got it," he said slowly, "at the same place you got your own fire-stick."

"The same place?" Bruce frowned. "I don't get this at all. Come on, talk up."

"In the Valley of Fools," Davin answered. "Where you have slept for so long."

"Slept . . . !"

Bruce groaned and turned helplessly away. "Crazy as a bedbug. Probably stole the rifle from some encampment. I never heard such crazy talk; Valley of Fools, Talking God—and *Irish* at that; no place like Los Angeles . . . " He muttered further to himself as he followed the steadily progressing girl ahead of him.

AND then, rounding a bend in the trail, he received the first real shock to his composure since the crash. Spread out before him was the desert —and what a desert! It was as gaunt and deserted and lifeless as though it

were a desert on a dead world. Nothing stirred, nothing grew, nothing *lived* on its dead gray expanse.

Except at its edge. There stood a village: crude, crumbling, constructed of ancient, weather-beaten stone. And in it were more people like the three who accompanied him. In the center of the village loomed a larger building; one that might have been a temple, or a church. It too was half in ruins.

This—in California! It couldn't be.

"Where am I?" gasped Bruce. "What is this place?"

"This is where the tribe of my father lives," explained Betty Lee. "It is the only city on the Great Desert. Hunters have brought tales of a great dead city beside the sea, far away, but none of us has ever been as far west as that, so we cannot tell if they have lied or not."

John Bruce listened bewilderedly. "It doesn't make sense," he said doggedly. "This is America—California—1940. It *must* be!"

"You speak of strange things," said Betty in puzzled tones. "My father once told me of a country called America, but he said it had been destroyed many hundreds of years ago . . . "

"Many hundreds . . . " began Bruce, a great fear beginning to clutch at his vitals.

"Yes," said Davin, suddenly triumphant in tone. "Now I know you are one of the Sleepers of the Valley of Fools. I have been there, and I have seen them. But I did not know that they would awake—*yet!* You have awakened, and with your metal bird, have flown out."

"I have not—" began Bruce angrily, then he faced Davin, peering at him intently. He went on slowly: "You say there are more . . . Sleepers . . . like me, in this Valley of Fools?"

"Yes. Many men, and many metal birds, and . . . " Davin halted abruptly. "I will not speak further. The things of the Valley are mine. I will use them to rule. But now, we go to see the priests—and the Talking God who will not talk."

Nor would he say another word, in spite of Bruce's seething curiosity.

They went on down the path, into the village, and past the staring, skin-clad people who stood about. Bruce's thoughts whirled around the possible significance of all the strange things he had heard, his presence in this crazy world, the inference that America had been destroyed hundreds of years ago! What in God's name had happened to him?

Passing a building larger, more rugged than the rest, and more ancient in appearance, Bruce discerned a cornerstone with a battered bronze plate embedded in it. He stepped over to scan it closely. Most of its inscription was almost unreadable; but plainest of all, at the bottom, were the numbers—248. What was the missing first numeral? Certainly it couldn't be 1. That would make the date 1248. It could only be —*two.* 2248!

Bruce was staggered. The twenty-third century, and a bronze cornerstone *worn with time!*

"Maybe *I'm* the crazy one," he said in a cracked whisper.

"Come," said Davin impatiently.

Abruptly John Bruce shrugged his shoulders and a set grin appeared on his lips. He gave up trying to understand the mystery. Whatever had happened, had happened, and the future held—adventure. Strange adventure, true, but adventure—and John Bruce had always craved action. It looked like he was getting it at last.

"Let's go," he agreed. "I want to see that Talking God more than ever, now!"

THEY came to the Temple, Davin striding boldly into its gloomy entrance, while Betty and Jan entered more reverently, more meekly. Bruce stared about interestedly, followed into the calm quiet of the interior.

The way led through what must once have been imposing hallways, finally into a large central room. And then Bruce knew what the building had been. A theatre, or a large music hall. There was the stage, and the musician's podium. And the floor rose in tiers around the stage, in a vast ring extending to the outer galleries, where ornately carved pillars still stood, mute witness to the impressive beauty of architecture the place must have once possessed.

Flaring torches were fixed about the stage, and in the center was an altar—an altar that was not a part of the original building, but crudely built of stone. On the altar was an effigy, small, insignificant in this huge hall. Bruce stared at it. Even from this distance, something about it seemed familiar. He walked forward.

"Stop!" came a voice.

Bruce halted, turned toward the source of the voice.

A tall man, cruel-faced, garbed in a robe of black skins, stood beneath a flaring torch. Behind him were more priests.

"What do you want?" asked the priest. "Who are you, stranger?"

"I'm John Bruce, air mail pilot," said Bruce, dropping his mail bag to the floor, "if that means anything to you. I cracked up in the hills, and my friends here," he indicated Betty, Jan and Davin, "brought me to this place. They said something about getting all this hocus-pocus explained by the priests of the Talking God. Is that thing there on the altar the God they've been telling me about?"

The priest folded his arms and eyed Bruce with a puzzled frown.

"What is an air mail pilot?" he asked.

"He is from the Valley of Fools," Davin broke in. "He is one of the Sleepers."

The priest stiffened. He faced Bruce with a scowl.

"What do you want of the Talking God?" he asked menacingly.

"I just want to see it, and to get some sensible talk out of you," snapped Bruce. "I'm not a Sleeper, whatever they are, and I don't come from the Valley of Fools. I'm a United States citizen, from Salt Lake City, Utah. I'm an American." He added the last as an afterthought.

It had a strange effect.

"American!" exclaimed the priest. "You lie! There is no more America. You *are* a Sleeper!"

Bruce began to lose his temper. He glared at the priest a moment, then he strode forward toward the altar. There was silence behind him as he did so; and suddenly, when he came close enough to see the thing on the altar, he stopped in his tracks. Then a loud laugh broke from his lips. For a long moment he fairly roared with mirth that echoed from the walls of the theatre. Then he turned back to the priests.

"So *that's* your Talking God!" he bellowed with laughter. "That wooden—"

"Seize him!" shouted the tall priest with an angry roar.

And suddenly John Bruce saw that the situation was not so funny, for as he whirled to defend himself, four burly, skin-clad priests hurled themselves on him. In an instant he was the center of a mêlée of enraged priests. A blow to his jaw snapped his wounded head back, and he reeled. Then, with savage force, a fist slammed into his neck from behind and he went down in a sea of whirling blackness, through

which he dimly heard Betty Lee's scream and the roaring voice of the black priest:

"Take him alive!"

After that he heard nothing.

CHAPTER II

Davin Acts

TO John Bruce, his awakening was not the escape from a nightmare, but rather the entrance into one. He recovered his senses in a bare, stone-walled room. And the cold stone of its flooring brought home, after a moment of bewilderment, the strangeness of the events that had led up to his position here.

John Bruce, pilot for American Airways, stranded, washed out in a primitive future world! It was incredible, unbelievable. But these cold stone buildings, these strange people, the dreary desolation of that amazing desert, the ancient tablet of bronze with its enigmatic date—2248!

America—gone centuries ago. How many? Five hundred years? Or maybe even a thousand?

In spite of his aching head, Bruce rapped his knuckles sharply against his brow. Nothing like this could happen. He had crashed, was even now lying delirious on some mountainside, or out of his head on some hospital bed. All this was but the dream-figments of an injured mind.

He staggered to his feet and stumbled over to a small window. He looked out. Not far away he recognized the temple . . . the old theatre where the Talking God—

In spite of himself, he grinned. Then he sobered instantly. No, this was no dream. He was here, in this strange world out of time, actually and physically, and there could be no doubt of it. In that temple was inexorable proof; that amazing effigy was centuries old, no less. The last time he'd seen it . . .

A clatter at the door interrupted his recollection of the occasion. Bruce whirled to see one of the skin-clad priests.

"Come," the fellow said gruffly. "You are to be punished."

"Punished!" began Bruce angrily. "Maybe Uncle Sam will have something to say about . . ."

He clamped his lips tightly shut as the realization came home once more that this was not the America he had known, but a land in the far future. Clenching his fists grimly, he strode after the priest, out into the sunlight of the village street.

He was immediately surrounded by a determined group of men, not priests but inhabitants of the village, armed with spears and clubs. None bore guns, nor was there any sign of their even knowing what a gun might be.

As he was marched along, Bruce thought of Davin, and of his possession of an efficient army weapon. That Valley of Fools— Obviously it existed, and somewhere in it was a mystery even greater than this world of the future—because it was a world of the past, seemingly a *sleeping* world that Davin confidently expected to wake up. Why did he think that? Suddenly Bruce wanted very much to see that valley. And if he wanted to see it, he'd have to begin a plan of action to escape. Why not begin right now?

"Where are you taking me?" he inquired of the priest.

"To be judged," came the curt reply.

Bruce grimaced. Then, struck by a sudden thought, he held his lips moveless, and—

"Those who dare judge a Sleeper, will die!"

The priest halted in his tracks. The

men who guarded Bruce stared about in abrupt terror as the sepulchral voice seemed to come from the air above them.

The priest was staring directly at Bruce, who grinned inwardly. Once more the weird voice, modulated as eerily as Bruce could manage deep down in his throat, rolled out of the air.

"Priest of the Talking God, beware!"

The priest went white. He whirled about in startled amazement, trying to find the speaker. Suddenly he staggered, gasped, slumped down to the ground. He was dead before he stretched his length in the hot sun, his blood beginning to stain the sand.

EVEN the unexpectedness of the spiteful crack of the rifle, the echoes of which were still rattling from the stone walls about them, could have been no more startling to Bruce than this sudden fulfilment of his just-uttered prophecy.

Rounding a corner came a group of men, led by Davin, who held the still smoking rifle in his hands.

"I will kill the first man who moves," he warned the frightened men about Bruce. "Come, John Bruce, we must go."

"What's all this about?" asked the aviator.

Davin grinned crookedly. "They intend to kill you. They want also to kill me, and Betty Lee and her brother. So, it is time that I act. We go now to the Valley of Fools."

"Why kill Betty and Jan?" asked Bruce sharply. "What have they done?"

"To be in league with a Sleeper is evil," quoted Davin with a smirk. "But worst of all, you dared laugh at the Talking God. For that, I think not even Betty and Jan Lee will forgive you. As for myself, your mirth did me good. I don't know why you laughed, but it takes nerve," he paused suggestively, *"or a fool* to do such a thing.

"But because you did it, I am sure you are lying, and that you *are* a Sleeper. Therefore, we go back to the Valley of Fools. Once there, I have plans."

"But what about Betty and Jan?" insisted Bruce. "I won't leave them."

"Nor I," said Davin maliciously. "They can't profit by remaining here, now. I can use them in my plans—and besides, Betty Lee is beautiful . . ."

"Why, you . . .!"

Davin's gun whipped up as Bruce stepped forward. "One false move," Davin snarled, "and I will blast you with the fire-stick."

He waved the gun menacingly at the cowering men behind Bruce, then snapped an order at his own men. In a moment they surrounded Bruce, and Davin led the way at a quick trot through the village.

"Where's Betty and Jan?" asked Bruce suspiciously.

"They wait at the edge of the desert," said Davin. "Others of my band have already rescued them from the priests."

Bruce subsided and jogged along. He thought rapidly. Obviously, Davin believed Bruce was necessary to whatever strange plan he had in mind; and just as obviously, the only way for Bruce to escape the priests and to reach the mysterious Valley of Fools was to appear to fall in with the renegade. But once he knew the real set-up, and what he faced in the valley as well, Bruce determined to take matters into his own hands.

THEY reached the desert beyond the village without mishap, although several times it was necessary for Davin to threaten villagers with his rifle to

avoid a conflict. It was obvious that the villagers bore a healthy respect for the repeating rifle, and for Davin's clumsy but efficient and ruthless use of it.

On the sand they found eight more of Davin's men, waiting with horses; sturdy animals that looked much like the cow ponies of the Texas panhandle. They wore no saddles, merely leather coverings fastened with crude leather thongs around the animals' bellies.

Bruce saw Betty and Jan mounted and waiting on ponies of their own. He strode over to them.

"Betty," he said to her. "What does all this mean?"

She looked down at him with a peculiar disdain in her eyes. "I do not know, John Bruce, but surely the Talking God will soon call down the lightning to destroy you. Are you not afraid to do what you are doing?"

Amazed at the cold reproval in her voice, Bruce stuttered a moment. Then:

"I am doing nothing," he tried to correct her. "Davin rescued me from the priests as they brought me out to be judged—for what offense I don't know . . ."

She gasped. "You insult the Talking God in his temple, then you *steal* him, and still you don't know what crime—"

He grasped her wrist. "What do you mean?" he snapped. "Who stole who?"

With dignity and determined strength she withdrew her hand. "I mean that you, John Bruce, have stolen the Talking God. He is right here, in one of the packs on the horses with the men of Davin."

Bruce whirled to Jan. "Is she telling the truth?" he demanded incredulously.

Jan nodded, his youthful face serious, but not condemning as was Betty's.

"She is. Davin's men have the Talking God. They stole it from the temple with the dawn. The priests will find it out at noon, at the ceremony of the sun. We must all be far away then, for they will surely come after us. And it will not matter which of us is guilty —we will *all* die."

Bruce turned on his heel—to face Davin's leer, and the menace of his leveled rifle.

"Yes, John Bruce, *Sleeper,* we have stolen the Talking God," he snarled. "And if John Bruce thinks that he will do more than laugh this time, let him try now!"

For a long instant Bruce stood silent, then he spoke.

"Lead on to the Valley of Fools," he said in level tones. "We must be well away from here by noon."

Davin lowered his rifle, his brows lifting, then he grinned.

"You cannot be called a fool," he said. "For a fool would not recognize that Davin holds all the cards in this game. And I think you know much more than you would admit of the things that await us in the valley. As for the Talking God, the priests will not dare attack us if it means destruction of the God!"

He pointed. "One of these horses is yours. Get on him, and follow me. We will need to travel all day, and most of the night to reach the valley."

The renegade mounted his own horse.

As John Bruce swung up on his, he saw Betty Lee urge hers away with kicking heels, her copper-haired head held high. He bit his lips. It was going to be tough playing a lone hand. But at sight of Jan, looking intently at him, he grinned. There was a lad who would help when the time came.

AS they rode along, Bruce discovered that Davin had also included the mail sacks in his loot. They were strapped on one of the horses.

But before long, Bruce forgot all his musings and plans in the wave of heat that engulfed the party as it struck out into the desert toward the north. He began suddenly to suffer, and he fairly gasped in the still air that grew constantly hotter and hotter.

His companions seemed not to mind. Even Betty rode along quite complacently, her coppery hair gleaming in the sun, and her disdain for him evident in her every motion as at times she caught him looking at her.

He grimaced and wiped his brow. At least, tomorrow he'd have a coat of tan that would make him look like an Indian. And the heat—well, if that snip of a girl ignored it, he could stand it too.

Obviously, the world had changed much since his own time. This bleak, utterly dead, hopeless-looking inferno of a desert seemed somehow artificial; as though, because of some poison, things were forever forbidden to grow here.

Bruce's mind roved on, trying to imagine what had happened. Had there been a war, and was America now a science-ravaged wilderness, with all its civilization gone? Or had some natural catastrophe caused this desolation? Had the sun somehow changed — but no, it looked the same as it always had.

He gave up thinking in futile terms, and urged his horse up ahead to where Jan Lee rode, eyes constantly roving from some distant marker up ahead to their rear, where the sullen hills were steadily dropping further back, losing themselves in shimmering heat. Bruce looked too, and saw no sign of life, or of pursuit.

"Jan," said Bruce, "what is this Valley of Fools?"

Jan looked at him. "You *aren't* a sleeper, are you?" he said slowly. "Somehow, I believe you are an American, though. The legends of those ancient people are so like you. I've always pictured the ancients as you are."

"The valley," persisted Bruce. "What is it like—where is it—why do you fear it?"

Jan peered back toward where Davin rode, his sardonic face impassive.

"You must not let Davin suspect that you are *not* a Sleeper," he whispered. "For he will kill you. Right now he does not know whether to fear you or not. If you are a Sleeper, then he must not antagonize you. He must seem to be your ally, until—"

"Until what?" Bruce urged.

THE lad faced ahead. "Up there," he said quietly, "is a valley that legend says once was the valley of the Lord of Death. Now it is the Valley of Fools; the fools who destroyed America with their senseless wars; the fools who even now, it is said, sleep beside their weapons.

"Davin has told me that the story is true. That in the valley are great metal birds, many hundreds of them—terrible machines like monsters, waiting to set out upon the world and kill. There are even metal men who have not the shape of men, yet await only a command to fight like men.

"And the Sleepers—" Jan's voice lowered still more, and Bruce thought he detected a note of fear beneath the superstitious awe that crept into the youth's tones. "The Sleepers are Americans, still living, but asleep for a thousand years, waiting the day when the Talking God will call them back to life, to set them out upon the great Yellow National far to the west and wipe it from the face of the earth."

As Jan talked on, Bruce's brain began to whirl with the significance of the lad's story. The conviction grew that all this was not legend, or an old-wives' tale, but *history*. The past of a van-

ished America, handed down by word of mouth among the primitive remnants of a once-great race.

"But some say that when they do wake," Jan went on, "they will find no Yellow Men to fight, because beyond the Western Ocean the country of the Yellow Men lies below the sea, destroyed by a great earthquake."

Jan stopped speaking and stared a moment at Bruce.

Then: "Now that I have told you what I know," he suggested, "tell me something of yourself, and your—your own world."

Noting the eager interest in the lad's eyes, Bruce complied. He spoke for more than an hour as they jogged along through the sand and the heat, telling him of the world that now seemed so remote and vanished. And as he talked Bruce stared ahead through the shimmering heat-haze. Looming up almost directly ahead were distant peaks.

Becoming silent, Bruce tried to discern them more clearly. Allowing his gaze to rove around to the left, he saw a more distant peak jutting up. It was familiar, and his sudden exclamation startled Jan.

"What is it?" Jan whispered. "What do you see?"

"Needle Peak!" exclaimed Bruce. "The Panamints! And straight ahead, the Funerals! Now, Jan Lee, I know what your Valley of Fools is!"

"You speak of mysteries," said Jan. "I know none of the names you mention."

"Death Valley" said Bruce. "It's only thirty miles from here!"

And that night, he knew he was right. For when they stood on the rim of the valley, bathed in brilliant moonlight, Bruce saw that it was as familiar as ever. Many times he'd seen it from the air on his mail route. It looked the same, not strangely altered in terrain as was the desert they had just traversed, the desert he now knew was the Mojave.

However, there were several strange changes outside the valley. About the rim were peculiar cone-shaped mountains. Most interesting, however, to Bruce down below in the valley itself, on the brilliant moonlit flats, were enigmatic shapes, looming out of a weird blue that almost seemed to glow like floating luminous gas in the deepest parts of the valley. It was a brilliant, weird oddly menacing blue that Bruce knew positively no man of his own age had ever seen in Death Valley.

There *was* something strange down there. Something that morning would reveal to him for the first time.

"We will sleep here, on the rim of the valley," said Davin, standing beside him. "In the morning we go down. And then, we shall see what we shall see."

As he lay down reluctantly in the warm sand, Bruce saw Jan and Betty conversing together in whispers, and he saw Betty's eyes turn toward him in the moonlight. There was a puzzled frown on her face.

CHAPTER III

The Valley of Fools

WITH the first rays of the sun to gild the Funerals, John Bruce stared down from the rim of the valley in an effort to pierce the morning mist. He wanted to see what those strange shapes of the night before really were.

And as he stood there, the sound of a step behind him made him turn. It was Betty Lee, and she was looking at him with a new light of conviction in her blue eyes, much unlike her haughty attitude of the day before.

"Betty!" he exclaimed.

"I wanted to tell you I'm sorry I accused you of stealing the Talking God," she said simply. "Jan told me of all you said yesterday, and I know now that you must be telling the truth. You *are* an American!"

He took her hand and squeezed it. "I'm glad you said that, Betty, because we're in a bad spot here. When Davin finds out I'm not a Sleeper, and loses the fear he has of me, he will have no scruples about killing us all. I'm going to need help—from you and Jan."

"But why should he want to kill us?" protested Betty.

"Because if what Jan told me is true, there are things down in that valley that he can use to make himself ruler of whatever is left of America and Americans. He's what we called a 'dictator' in my time."

Betty stared down into the thinning mists below.

"What *is* down there?" she whispered. Suddenly she clung to him. "John Bruce, I am afraid."

In that instant, as her head went to his shoulder, and his arm closed naturally about her slim form, John Bruce too felt fear. Fear that something might happen to this girl of the future. And with the fear came determination that it should not. His voice was low and firm when he spoke.

"You needn't be afraid, Betty," he promised, running his fingers through the coppery glory of her hair. "Nothing in that valley will hurt *you!*"

The rest of the camp was astir now. The guards who had been left to watch the desert behind for some sign of Betty Lee's people and the priests, were coming in.

Davin came to the rim of the valley, stared hard at Bruce, who stared back, retaining his protective pose with Betty snuggled under his arm.

For a brief instant Bruce saw bitter hate and insane lust gleaming in the depths of those hard black eyes.

"Perhaps today," Bruce said softly to Davin, "the Talking God will talk!"

With the implied threat, Bruce knew irrevocably that it would be death for one of them, once Davin's caution overrode his fear of Bruce's unknown origin. His lips tightened.

Down in the valley now the mists were dispersing swiftly, and the sun was beginning to pick out tiny glints of metallic brightness.

Instant by instant the air cleared, and instant by instant Bruce's arm tightened unconsciously about Betty's shoulder, and the hair rose with a prickling sensation on his neck at what now became fully revealed below them.

UP the vast stretch of ancient Death Valley was an encampment. A vast army encampment. Row upon row of giant bombing planes, plainly marked with the insignia of the United States Army, gleamed silver and gold in the sunlight. Tents and barracks stretched in orderly rows. Rows of tanks, heavily armored monsters bristling with guns, seemed awaiting only a signal to advance toward the west. And here and there were weird mechanisms, mounted on metal legs, like robot spiders, manning mobile guns on tractors.

"Great God!" exclaimed Bruce tensely. "There are *men* down there too!"

He bit his lips tightly, after that first involuntary exclamation, ignoring Davin's steady stare at him. But even the menace of the man could not quell the rising flood of incredulous amazement sweeping over him. Down there, in Death Valley, was a miracle that could not be! And yet it was.

"Tents!" Bruce whispered. "Tents, the Lord knows how many hundreds

of years old, and in perfect condition! Planes lying there for ages, and shining as brightly as though they had just been shipped from the factory! I'm dreaming. This *can't* be true!"

But with the coming of full sunlight, Bruce could not doubt the evidence of his eyes. There below them was an immense array of battle equipment, ready and waiting for action as the day, long ago, when time seemed to have laid its infinite hand over the valley and stayed all motion, all decay, all life.

And as he stared, Bruce felt the stirrings of interest that come to any pilot at sight of a marvelous new plane design.

"What beauties!" he breathed, looking at the bombers.

Even the latest designs of 1940 hadn't possessed a shadow of the perfection of these sleek ships. Bruce's eyes gleamed at the thought of what he could do at the controls of one of them.

Suddenly Bruce felt his arms pinioned behind him, and Betty was snatched away, to be held tightly by one of Davin's men. Davin himself stood leering, his gaze on Bruce.

"What's this mean, Davin?" Bruce said tightly.

"Just caution, John Bruce," Davin mocked suavely. "We are going down into the valley, and there are plenty of fire-sticks lying around. I do not intend that you get your hands on one and turn it against me and my men. And what I plan to do in the valley must be insured against all possibility of failure."

"Just what *do* you intend doing?" asked Bruce pointedly.

"You are a Sleeper," said Davin. "You know how to fly those metal birds. You know the use of all the strange things in the Valley of Fools. You are going to teach me how to use them. And if you are smart, you will not work against me, for if you do, I will kill you. *Together* we can rule the world!" He laid sly emphasis on this last.

Bruce laughed harshly. "You mean that when I have shown you how to use the machines in the valley, you will kill me. Well, let's have this clear from the start: I will show you nothing. And if I get the chance, I'll shoot you down like I would a mad dog!"

Davin's face went white with fury. "You *will* show me, John Bruce! Because if you do not . . . there is yet the blue gas and"—he paused suggestively—*"and Betty Lee!"*

Bruce's startled glance swept once more dawn into the valley and sought out the mysterious blue patches he'd seen in the moonlight the night before. They had seemed to glow brightly under the moon, but now they were only faintly discernible. But as he stared, Bruce realized that the whole valley floor had a slight tinge of blue, as though even the sand had been dyed lightly with the color.

"I don't think you would like to see Betty Lee placed in the blue gas of the Sleepers," Davin said softly.

But Bruce suddenly was paying no attention to the renegade. He was staring down into the valley at a distant tent, at a flap that was now open, and his eyes bore down on the tiny figure of a man who lay prone on his face in the entrance—*prone because he had just fallen there!*

"Lead on, Davin," said Bruce tensely. "I will show you what you want to know!"

THEY were halfway down the slope when the shout came from the valley rim. Bruce, who was closely guarded by two of Davin's men with spears at his back, whirled with the rest and

stared up at the line of men forming above them.

"The priests!" gasped Betty. "They have found us!"

It was obvious that those who pursued were filled with consternation at sight of the things in the valley, and of their quarry already halfway down into the place of superstition.

The black-clad priest was motioning violently, and even from that distance, his voice came to the fugitives. In a moment, his harangue was seen to take effect. Grimly the pursuing warriors began to advance. Obviously not even their superstitious fear of the Valley of Fools could keep them from rescuing the Talking God.

Davin cursed. He bawled at one of his men.

"Fetch the Talking God!" he roared. "We cannot fight all those men. Hold it up so that they may see."

The pack containing the wooden effigy of the Talking God was soon removed from the horse that bore it, and in an instant, the idol was being held aloft.

Davin stepped grimly out before the group of advancing warriors, who had loosed a yell and lunged forward as they saw the Talking God. The renegade lifted his rifle above his head with both arms and stood there dramatically.

As he watched the approaching warriors surge to a halt, Bruce grudgingly admitted that whatever other qualities he lacked, Davin had courage.

"Stop!" roared Davin. "Come no closer, Black Priest. If you attack, I shall destroy the Talking God. My fire-stick can shatter it, just as it can kill men. If you would prevent this, return now to the village."

"We will *not* return, Davin," called the Black Priest, his voice calm and cold. "This time, unbeliever, you have gone too far. Not even the fire-stick can save you. And if you blast the Talking God, your end will be so horrible that for all time, women and children will shudder at memory of it."

Davin laughed scornfully, hoarsely. "Big words, priest," he sneered. "I have no fear of you, or of your men. I warn you for the last time, return, or I shall kill you where you stand."

John Bruce stepped forward. Reaching Davin's side, he shouted up the hillside.

"I am a Sleeper! Listen to me!"

"Quiet, you fool!" snarled Davin in startled dismay. "Let me handle this."

Bruce looked at him coldly. "That priest means business. No matter what you do, they'll get us. They have three hundred men. We have eleven, and a girl. And we have only one gun. They rush us, and we don't last two minutes."

"We are listening," the Black Priest's voice drifted down. "But whatever you say, we will not stop. I will give you until a man can count two hundred to say what you have to say. Then we are coming down there."

"Good!" boomed Bruce. "Come closer, all of you, that you may better hear what I have to say."

Davin gripped Bruce's arm and whirled him around.

"*You* die first," he snarled, "if this be treachery!"

Bruce glared at him. "Do you think I want to die any more than you?" he questioned coldly.

The Black Priest complied with Bruce's invitation with alacrity and walked calmly forwrd, followed by his men. Twenty yards away he halted.

"Speak, Sleeper," he said mockingly. "And when you have finished, you will die!"

BRUCE glanced back at the man who still held the Talking God aloft in trembling hands. Then, with a gleam

in his eye, he turned back to the Black Priest—

"I am the Talking God! I speak for myself!"

Weirdly, in deep, majestic tones, the macabre voice sounded on the still valley air. Bruce, whose lips had not moved, simulated surprise just as though the voice had interrupted what he had been prepared to say.

Behind him came a terrified scream. The man who had been holding the Talking God dropped the wooden figure to the sand and stumbled backward from it in utter horror, until he tripped over a stone and fell headlong. Then lay there, babbling with terror, too stricken to rise.

On the face of Davin there appeared an expression of stunned amazement, and of growing fear. His swarthy cheeks blanched, the rifle dropped from nerveless fingers.

The Black Priest stood stiffly frozen in his tracks with utter surprise. Behind him, most of his men stood rooted to the spot, but several of them dropped to their knees, moaning with terror.

Bruce eyed the priest narrowly. Here was the only man he would have to watch. He snatched up Davin's rifle, held it at the ready.

"Menace not the Talking God!" the Black Priest said, mistaking the airman's motives. "Even though you be a Sleeper. . . ."

At the words, Bruce knew the man had more courage than any other present. Notwithstanding the fact that he was confronted by the spectacle of his own god speaking for the first time, he still possessed enough wit to turn the speech to his own ends.

"No man shall harm a Sleeper . . . not even my high priest shall do it!"

The Black Priest's jaw dropped. He stared at his men, who had also heard. They looked at him in surprise. It was as though the god had commanded them to forestall his actions.

"Guess that'll hold you," muttered Bruce under his breath.

Once more the Talking God spoke:

"I command that there be no fighting among you. All of you will go down into the Valley of Fools, and there administer to any you find alive. For, lo, the Sleepers awake!"

As the sepulchral words ceased, all eyes turned involuntarily toward the flats below, to see what Bruce himself had been covertly observing.

Betty Lee's scream shattered the stunned silence that followed. The hair on Bruce's neck crawled in spite of himself. For the strange figure that tottered from one of the nearest tents and made its way across the hot sand toward them, seemed a ghost from the past. It was a figure clad in the regulation uniform of the United States Army—a figure that might have come straight out of the 1940 that Bruce knew.

But the face!

It was small wonder that Betty screamed. For the newly awakened Sleeper's face was *blue*—as blue as the gas in the deepest pockets of the lower valley. Blue—and *old!*

CHAPTER IV

Battle in the Valley

JOHN BRUCE walked slowly forward. Abruptly the approaching soldier saw the group on the hillside and his eyes widened in his ancient, blue-tinted face. There came a hoarse croak of surprise from his shriveled lips, then with surprising agility he turned and ran toward a light gun mounted on a tractor.

"Stop!" Bruce yelled in consterna-

tion. "Stop, soldier! This isn't an attack!"

But the man paid no attention. He reached the gun, clambered into the saddle, touched a switch. After a few sputters and a whine of electrical forces, the tractor burst into life. Like a flash it wheeled around, the muzzle of its deadly looking gun sweeping toward the group.

"Stop!" screamed Bruce, but as he yelled, he knew it was useless.

Digging his heels into the sand, Bruce stopped his headlong rush, whipped his rifle to his shoulder with frantic haste and fired.

Loosing a thin, high cry of agony, the Sleeper leaped convulsively from the saddle of the tractor-gun. Like an empty bag he collapsed on the sand, twitched a moment, and was still.

The gun itself roared on, directly toward Bruce. He leaped out of the way. Launching his body at the saddle, he pulled himself up, threw the switch he'd seen the soldier operate. The tractor-gun ground to a halt before the stunned tribesmen.

Gasping for breath from his efforts, Bruce stared at them from his perch atop the weapon. The Black Priest stood before him, looking sternly up.

"You are not a Sleeper," he accused. "And you have disobeyed the Talking God; you have killed a Sleeper! *For that you must die!* The Talking God has spoken!"

Bruce saw suddenly how this man had become a power in the tribe. He was clever. He was an opportunist. And Bruce also saw that whatever psychological advantage he himself had had a moment before, was gone. He would now have to play a lone hand.

His hand touched the starting switch, and his eyes flicked swiftly over the controls before him. He recognized the firing trip and smiled grimly. It would work. Belts of ammunition, fully charged, filled the containers at the gun-breach.

Even as he acted, he wondered at the marvel that had kept these mechanisms in perfect condition through what might easily be a thousand years, unrusted, undamaged, and even electrical power plants fully charged. Or *had* they really been in this valley through the ages? Had they also been transplanted through time by the same mysterious phenomenon that had transported him so violently into this world of the future?

But the sight of the Black Priest's menacing figure before him drove these thoughts from John Bruce's mind. His finger tightened on the control switch.

"No, priest," he admitted boldly. "I am not a Sleeper. But I *am* an American. And the Sleepers are Americans."

Bruce motioned to Betty Lee and her brother. Both were staring at him. Jan had an eager look in his eyes, a look that amounted almost to adoration. In the eyes of the girl there was something else. Their unspoken message thrilled through Bruce like an electric shock, even in the tenseness of the moment.

"Betty! Jan!" he said. "Come here to me."

Betty scrambled swiftly to him and Jan, upon impulse, snatched up the Talking God. He reached the tractor-gun beside Betty.

"I'm with you, John Bruce," he said triumphantly. "I, too, am an American!"

The Black Priest tensed for a leap, and his men surged forward.

"Get back!" shouted Bruce. "Or I'll kill you all!"

He elevated the muzzle of the gun and depressed the trip. It sputtered several times, and behind the advancing men there came several terrific concus-

sions. Geysers of dust sprang skyward. Bruce himself was startled by the violence of the explosions.

But they achieved the desired result. The Black Priest and his men halted in consternation.

"Now, went on Bruce, "you and your men will leave the valley. When I have finished my work here, I will return, and with me will come the Talking God, to be restored to his proper place in the temple."

His lips closed and he ceased speaking. But from the effigy clutched tightly in Jan's arms came a sepulchral intonation.

"Do as the American says, priest," the voice boomed.

Jan stiffened, and his youthful face blanched. But he didn't flinch, standing bravely motionless. Mentally, Bruce applauded the youth's courage. The kid had what it took.

"Climb up here, you two," he ordered.

Jan and Betty obeyed, and Bruce started the tractor. He threw the mechanism into reverse and the tractor backed slowly away from the frightened group.

At this only the Black Priest and Davin, the renegade, stood their ground. The rest turned and scrambled up the slope toward the valley rim. Finally the priest and Davin turned also, and regarding each other with caution, went after their fleeing followers.

JAN LEE was staring at John Bruce with a look of question in his eyes that seemed to deny any possibility of his being able to suppress it. Abruptly he burst out,

"How did you make the Talking God talk? You did it, didn't you?" he accused.

"Jan!" Betty exclaimed. "What are you saying?"

But Bruce didn't answer. Instead he whirled the tractor-gun around, and faced the western sky. A loud drone had become audible now. Swooping down with startling suddenness came a plane, its guns spitting fire.

Bruce jerked the muzzle of his own weapon up, kept his finger on the firing trip. The gun stuttered madly, sending a stream of deadly one-inch shells screaming heavenward. Wildly Bruce sprayed the sky, hoping for a hit—and got one!

The wing of the oncoming plane dissolved like magic in a maze of splintered wreckage, as a bullet burst squarely in the middle of a large red circle painted in its center.

The plane plunged down crazily and crashed a quarter mile from them, pancaking down and nosing over.

"That," said Bruce dazedly, after a moment of awed silence, "was a *Japanese ship!*"

"Japanese?" queried the shaken Jan. "What is Japanese?"

"Japan," replied Bruce slowly, "is the country of the Yellow Men. You told me last night that their land had been destroyed by an earthquake many hundreds of years ago that sank it beneath the sea."

"What does that mean?"

Bruce shrugged worriedly. "I don't know. Maybe plenty. Maybe that this war isn't over yet! But there may be somebody alive in that ship. It didn't hit too hard. Let's go see."

Suiting the word to the action, he drove the tractor-gun over the sand toward the wrecked Japanese fighter.

It was a two-seater job, and as they neared it, a figure was seen to crawl weakly from the wreck and clamber to its feet. Bruce trained his gun carefully on the man and brought the tractor-gun to a halt. He frowned when he saw that the face was as blue as the

face of the first Sleeper who had awakened. But then he saw the man's eyes. They were undeniably slant!

Bruce aimed the muzzle of the gun at the man's breast.

"If you've got a gun on you, drop it," he commanded.

Wearily the Jap produced an automatic, dropped it at his feet. He swayed slightly, staggered a few steps forward, then toppled down.

Warily Bruce clambered down from the tractor-gun and walked forward. Reaching the Jap soldier's prone form he knelt and lifted the head to his knee. He stared curiously down into the blue-tinted face.

The slant eyes looked up at him with animosity.

"I die with honor," he spat. "Nippon has won!"

"What do you mean?" asked Bruce.

The slant eyes widened. "You do not know?" The question was incredulous. After an instant, triumph shot into the slanted orbs.

"Then I have the honor of informing you, American dog, that last night a fleet of our fighters and bombers landed safely in the north end of the valley, after deluging you Americans with the blue gas. How you survived, I do not know. But I have seen your entire camp stricken—dead. Nippon has won, American! America is no more!"

BRUCE frowned. "Your comrades—are they still in the valley?"

"That you will soon discover. This morning, after awakening, I was sent out on a reconnaissance flight. We found all the Americans dead but you. We tried to kill you, too, but you got in a lucky shot."

Bruce glanced up at Jan and Betty, who stood beside him now, staring down at the Nipponese in wonder. Once more the aviator questioned the enemy flyer.

"You say this raid was last night? Then how do you account for the fact that—that more time than that has passed?"

"More time . . ."

"Yes." Bruce hesitated. "Several days . . ."

The Jap's eyes held wonder. He wrinkled his brow in a frown.

"Then the accident must have caused us to sleep overlong."

"The accident?"

"Yes. Unfortunately one of our bombers, loaded with the blue gas, crashed in the landing, having been damaged in the raid. Many of our men were overcome, but the concentration was not enough to kill them. It merely produced a sleep—"

"And now all your men have awakened?"

"Most certainly. And tonight they attack!" The Nipponese looked at the three and laughed. "They will find only two men and a girl. It is good. Nippon has won!" Then, with a shudder, the enemy aviator slumped down. He was dead.

"Good work, sir," a weak voice came from behind them.

Startled, Bruce whirled about, allowing the Jap to sink back to the sand. There, facing them stood an officer of the United States Army, his skin old and blue-tinted, but there was a half-puzzled smile on his face.

"I saw you shoot down that Jap ship, sir," continued the officer, weaving uncertainly on his feet. "It was a great piece of work. Whoever you are, I shall see that you receive a citation."

Bruce stared around the camp a moment, and an eerie sensation crept over him. All about men were lurching to their feet, bewildered, uncertain, but undeniably alive. The Sleepers of the Valley of Fools were waking!

Then he faced the officer again, and

saluted sharply.

"John Bruce," he said, "American Airways Mail Pilot, sir, at your service!"

The officer motioned to Betty and Jan. "Who are these two?" he said curiously.

Bruce hesitated a moment, then: "As an officer of the United States Army," he said slowly, "I think you will be able to withstand something of a shock. Something has happened here in Death Valley that you do not understand."

The officer frowned. "Yes," he admitted. "Something has happened. I am completely bewildered. I remember an air-raid warning, the explosion of several bombs, then a gas overcame me. Now, I awake, and it is daylight, and my men are all unconscious, with peculiar blue-tinted skin. What does it all mean?"

"The truth is, sir," said Bruce bluntly, "your camp was raided by the Japs and a new gas was dumped on you. It filled the valley, rendered every man in the camp unconscious, and by some uncanny means has preserved everything, even to the power in your electric batteries, for what I estimate as something near a thousand years!"

"A thousand years!" For an instant the officer seemed about to collapse, then he drew himself erect.

"And what of America?" he questioned hoarsely.

Bruce looked at him gravely. "Gone. America is only a legend today. These two here are descendants of the Americans, living quite primitively in ancient, half-ruined cities. Japan also is gone. It is a matter of legendary record that it sank into the sea hundreds of years ago in a great earthquake."

The officer stared at Bruce. "And you, sir—?"

Bruce shrugged. "I am from 1940. Somehow, while carrying mail from Salt Lake City, to Los Angeles, I hit a warp, or pocket, in time, and crashed about thirty miles south of here, where these two found me. Hearing of the Valley of Fools, I came to see it."

Suddenly the officer laughed, almost hysterically. "The Valley of Fools! So that's what legend has made of us! The Americans of 1960—winding up in history as fools!"

Bruce's eyes narrowed and he stepped forward gripping the officer's shoulder and shaking him.

"Get hold of yourself!" he commanded. "You may have a legend built around you, but if what that dead Jap told me is true, this camp will be raided tonight by a fleet of bombers and fighters, who like you, have survived because of their own blue gas. If you don't want to make the legend come true, I'd advise you to prepare for invasion. Some of those men who are awakening now may need attention."

ATTENTION had been no word for it. By nightfall, Bruce was weary to his finger-tips, aiding in the resuscitation of those Sleepers who needed assistance. Many had been in deeper pockets of gas than others.

Now, standing on the rim of the valley, where he'd taken Betty and Jan for safety, he stared anxiously at the northern sky.

The moon came up, and Betty clung to him as a faint droning became audible.

"They are coming!" she whispered.

Bruce squeezed her hand. "Yes," he said. "And now, I must go down. I am an American, and while there is fighting to be done, they'll need me."

Jan advanced out of the dark. "I am going too," he announced simply. "I am an American also."

For an instant Bruce was silent, then he extended his hand. "Come on,

then," he said. And to Betty. "You stay here. We'll be back when it's over."

She smiled at him bravely. "I'll be waiting," she promised.

In the light of the moon, and as the throbbing motors above grew to a crescendo of sound, Bruce and Jan raced down the slope and into the valley.

Abruptly bombs began to burst, and a roar of gunfire rattled from the camp. Great guns coughed. Robot mechanisms aimed them and fired them with mechanical accuracy, as witnessed by the flames that enveloped plane after plane. American planes took off and met the Japs in combat aloft.

Japanese planes began raining down to destruction, advancing on an encampment they had believed unprepared.

But neither were the Americans prepared for the advance of Nipponese ground tanks, charging into the thick of the fray at seventy miles per hour. Tractor-guns, operated by weird, many-legged robots followed. Biting white rays hissed silently from their gun muzzles, and where the rays hit an American plane, it became enveloped for an instant in brilliant white phosphorescence. Then the plane fell apart and plunged to earth, a mass of fragments.

Bruce raced forward toward a tractor-gun that had ceased operation, its robot struck by a diving Jap fighter's one-inch gun. He leaped into the seat and began firing at the advancing Jap tanks. One of them blew up with a loud roar. After that, Bruce fought blindly, engulfed in a hell of sound and flame.

But abruptly the din began to fall off. Bruce stopped his tractor-gun in bewilderment as plane after plane, American and Jap alike, tumbled out of the sky out of control. What was happening?

At his side, an American tank lurched to a crazy halt. A man tumbled from its interior, his face a mask of horror. In an instant Bruce saw why. The interior was a shambles of dried, mummified husks of men who had slept centuries too long. The man who staggered out, fell now, a dried husk.

In ten minutes death had completed its awful march through the valley. Through the drifting smoke and flame Bruce could see only burning wreckage, and the horrible corpses of men who aged a thousand years in a matter of minutes and fell dead beside their weapons.

Out of this scene of havoc came Jan Lee, unscathed, but white and shaken.

"Let us get out of here," he choked. "All of them are dead."

LATER, on the valley rim, Bruce held Betty in his arms, and they stared together over the desolation that had come to the last Americans. Bruce was thinking.

"Looks like the mail will never be delivered," he said. "It's a thousand years late anyhow."

Betty Lee looked up at him.

"Tell me one thing, John," she said, her eyes full of concern. "What did Jan mean when he said you had made the Talking God talk?"

John Bruce looked down at the girl's face, then abruptly he laughed. He bent his head and kissed her.

"You little worry-bug," he said. "I knew the Talking God way back in 1940. And he talked then—a lot. Millions of people laughed at him. You see, Betty, your Mak-r-Thee is really only a ventriloquist's dummy. The ventriloquist, whom I used to like to imitate on Major Bowes' amateur hour, was a man named Edgar Bergen, and the Talking God's full name was—Charlie McCarthy."

The Observatory by the Editor

(Concluded from page 5)

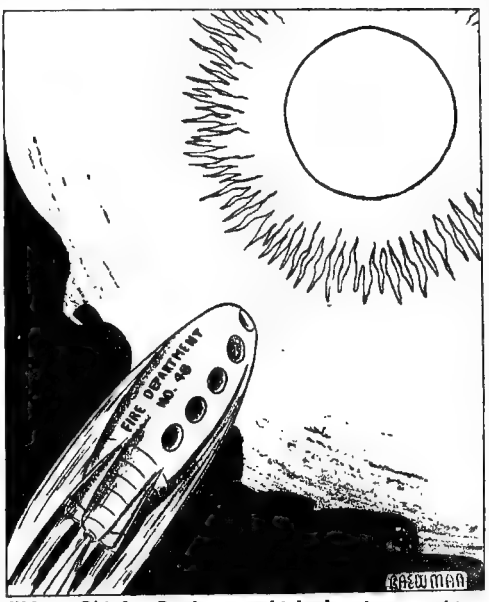
developing strength? The answer is *a glue sandwich!* But don't get us wrong. We're not talking about something to eat. It's *plywood*—which weight for weight is stronger than steel!

Plywood consists of two thin strips of wood pressed together with glue in between. It has been known for a long time—but never so strong until recently. Trick is to have a glue that will stick. The two paper-thin sheets of wood, if held together, are capable of a greater resistance to tension and torsion than any metal or alloy known!

And now a synthetic resin has been created that holds! As a result, plywood is being used for piano cases and radio cabinets, beer barrels and box cars, speed boats and auto bodies, pre-fabricated houses and jigsaw puzzles — for everything! For, of course, it delivers the strength of steel at much lower cost.

And with less weight. Which is why it is now being used for airplanes, with the probable effect of a revolution in aviation. Cheaper planes, within the reach of all, and performance that exceeds that of the great Clippers!

Science fiction marches on to truth! Remember "Suitcase Airplanes" in *Amazing Stories* long ago?



"Hey, Chief. Don't you think there's something phony about this alarm?"

SITTING in the barber's chair the other day, we found ourselves looking at our own image, stretching away in manifold duplication to an infinite distance in the pair of mirrors on opposite sides of the room. It made us think. What if two of the most perfect mirrors in the world were to be mounted with such mechanical perfection, that they would exactly reflect a light ray without dispersing it, or diverting it from the surface at an angle?

Just one single spark, flashed in the space between, would emit a ray of light which would be reflected back and forth at 186,000 miles per second. Would it be forever trapped? Would it wear out, so to speak? Would it remain constant? You can think about this. It baffles us.

And what if it wasn't a spark, but a constant light? Would the light build up until it was hot enough to melt the glass? Just like concentrating sunlight with a lens upon a small area?

SCIENCE comes to the rescue! Store teeth, and especially wobbly "lowers," have long been an object of general humor, as well as a source of personal discomfort to those compelled to wear them. But now they've been put on a "solid" basis. Science proudly presents—magnetic teeth!

Trouble with false teeth has always been that while upper plates could be held fast to the palate by suction, lowers had to be left more or less free, depending on only their own weight to hold them in place. And they wiggled, and jiggled, and skid and slid—sometimes completely out!

All the time the solution was so simple we wonder why we never thought of it ourselves.

Any high school student knows that like poles of magnets repel each other. All that was needed was to set magnets opposite each other that way in the upper and lower plates!

An eastern dentist came to that conclusion no less than ten years ago—but it took one of science's latest achievements to make his idea a reality. That was the development of a magnetic alloy capable of exerting with a relatively small mass the considerable force needed. General Electric's new "Alnico," which lifts — or repels — 1,500 times its own weight, had that ability, and it is a similar alloy that is now making store teeth "hold tight" in a good number of mouths.

But we wonder what happens when sun spots — and magnetic storms come! It'll be a job for a trouble shooter!

FOR six years and at a cost of $6,000,000, researchers have been trying to find a better safety glass. Now they have it—and we have *rubber* glass!

At least it acts like rubber. Ordinary safety glass has little "give." It will crack without splintering because the pieces are held together by a plastic filler which is sandwiched between the two layers of glass. But what good's that if it's your head that cracks it? This new product (we submit the name "Glabber") stretches like a rubber band and snaps back into shape! *Rap.*

ADAM LINK, Champion Athlete

by Eando Binder

"I WANT to file citizenship papers," I said. "I am Adam Link, the robot."

The official, Dahlgren by name, stared at me. I suppose it is strange to hear a metal being talk. To be confronted by a manlike creation—alloy legs and body, featureless face of metal, jingling internal hum, and all—and realize it has a mind of its own. That it is *living!*

Jack Hall and Tom Link, my friends, stood beside me. Also Eve, my companion robot and my mental mate. We had decided, after long discussion, to try this. I had the complete papers drawn up, with Tom's help, for both Eve and myself. Our first "naturalization" papers.

"Impossible!" snapped the official finally. His face reddened. He felt we were making a fool of him. "Citizenship is granted only to—uh—human beings."

With iron grip, I swung the wheel hard and swerved the speeding car around the unconscious man.

ADAM LINK decides that the only way he can prove his human qualities is to match sportsmanship with sportsmanship competing with humans in the sport world

Tom spoke up sharply.

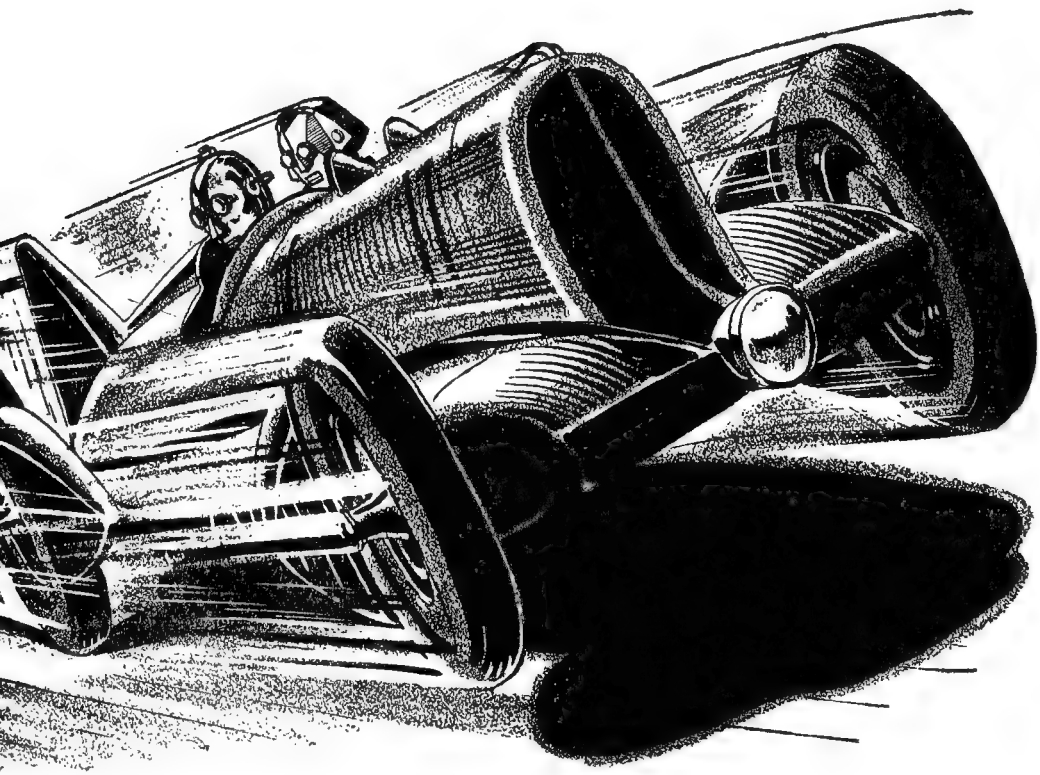
"Can you show me that statement, in black and white? The laws read that any *person,* regardless of race, color, creed or nationality, may apply for citizenship."

Dahlgren was taken aback. I was a little amused. Regardless of *race,* the laws say. Even beings from another world would be eligible by that loose term. Ridiculous thought. But still, I'm afraid you humans have been too smugly assured that in all the universe there can only be intelligent beings like yourself.

"Person!" scoffed Dahlgren. "Is he a person?"

He looked me up and down with a stiff smile. "It's quite obvious that he's nothing more than a clever, mechanical apparatus. A robot that walks and talks. A machine. You can't label that a 'person'. What you want is a *patent!*"

He did not mean to be insulting. He simply failed to realize I had a brain.



Eve and I looked at each other. What of our minds? You don't patent a mind.

Tom tried pleading.

"Don't look at it that way," he cried. "They have personality and character of their own, like any of us. They have minds. They think, reason, know the difference between right and wrong. They want to live in our world, as full-fledged members. They've done good already. You know their story——"

He went on briefly, in summary.

For two years I had passed through a quiet human period of adjustment to life since my creation. I had been hounded as a Frankenstein slayer of my creator, sat patiently through a court trial, and won freedom—and legal human status. I had conducted a consultant business, and rebuilt slums with the money gained. I had strangely stirred the heart of a human girl. I had created a robot mate for myself, to live as humans live normally, in pairs. With Eve, I had broken up a criminal ring in this midwestern city.

Now, all those tumultuous events behind me, I felt I had a place in human society. I wanted to become a citizen, and the forerunner of others of my kind. We could do civilization much good.

TOM stressed that, in conclusion. "You know how they broke up this city's biggest crime ring. Could any human have done better—or as much?"

Dahlgren gave Eve and me a grudging look of admiration, for that. But he shook his head stubbornly.

"Still, they aren't human beings—legally."

Tom smiled triumphantly, having maneuvered the discussion to that angle. "Adam Link *is* a human being, legally. You read about his trial. He was duly entered in the civil court records. I can furnish them. Also Eve Link, through *her* trial, is legally a human being!"

Dahlgren looked as though he had been driven into a corner.

"Technically," he floundered.

"Perhaps," Tom shot back. "But I think it's up to you to prove he *isn't* human—legally. You can't ignore court records. Do you know what Adam Link can do if you refuse to take up this matter? He can sue you!"

Dahlgren pondered that, half angrily, half worriedly.

"I'll send the papers to Washington, to higher authorities," he acceded. "I won't take the responsibility myself." He went on, almost spitefully. "I guarantee you they won't accept it. They'll throw it out on technicalities. Where was Adam Link born? Who were his parents? Things like that—"

His eyes narrowed shrewdly then.

"There's more to this than just awarding Adam and Eve Link citizenship, for their good deeds. The question is, do we want *more* robots to follow, parading up and down our streets as full-fledged citizens, accorded all the privileges of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights?"

"What do you mean?" I demanded, and I think my mechanical voice was rather stentorian. "That you think robots might become a menace?"

It was that, of course. Yet I couldn't blame him for the stand he took. It was, after all, a situation no man had ever faced before, in all human history. Not even Solomon would have seen a clear answer.

I knew the thoughts streaming vaguely through his mind. He was being asked to make room, in human society, for alien beings. For the first of the future robot race. How could he take the tremendous responsibility of that step? How could he be sure some frightful catastrophe might not result?

Frankenstein! A robot race gone Frankenstein! If that happened, he would be blamed. And every official in Washington would feel the same, and shy from the decision.

I HAD taken a step forward, involuntarily. Dahlgren had paled, perhaps visioning me going berserk. Jack's hand pulled me back.

"No use arguing, Adam," he murmured. "I knew this wouldn't work."

Dahlgren stood up from his desk. His instinctive fear over, he spoke directly to me, almost in a friendly fashion.

"I knew you were coming eventually, Adam Link. I've been prepared for this. Do you know what is against you mainly? Public opinion! I've watched the papers. Look at what this commentator says."

He handed me a newspaper, with a syndicated column that reached the homes and minds of millions. I read the item at a glance, with my television scanning.

"Adam Link, the intelligent robot, is definitely a national figure today. As a startling, almost fantastic novelty out of some lurid thriller, he captures the imagination. But the novelty has worn off. Even most of the jokes about him have died down.

"Science has created metal-life. We can accept that. But we must not blind ourselves to its deeper significance. Adam Link will want to be accepted as a human being. He may have legal status, but so has a dog. A dog may inherit money, and be tried for a crime. And despite his laudable actions so far, and his own protestations that he is human in all but body—*is he human?* I maintain he is inferior to humans in all mental respects. His so-called emotional reactions are all pseudo-human, mechanical, not real. Personally, I doubt if they exist at all!"

The commentator, signing himself Bart Oliver, left that damning indictment echoing like a challenge.

"You see?" said the official softly. "A government like ours must never run against public opinion. Washington won't grant you citizenship." Then he waved impatiently. "I'm a busy man. Good day, gentlemen."

He should have added "—and Mrs. Link." He had completely ignored the fact that she was a lady. A woman, a girl, as human as any housed in flesh instead of metal, because her mind had been patterned to a feminine scheme.

CHAPTER II

A Great Idea

BACK at his apartment, Jack shook his head again.

"No, I knew it wouldn't work. Not that easily. In Washington, they'll wrangle a while and then reject the application. They won't want to set a precedent, or buck the public. Right, Tom?"

Tom nodded wordlessly, and there was silence in the room.

Wasn't there some way, my thoughts asked? We two, the Adam and Eve of intelligent robots, were ready to become citizens. I was sure of that myself. Dr. Link, my creator, had set his heart on that the day he saw I was not merely a clever machine, but a thinking being.

Tom broke the silence. "Maybe we should take out the—" he hesitated, glancing at me—"well, the patent!"

"No." My microphonic voice was firm. "The secret of the metal-brain is locked in my mind. I would trust no one else with it."

Jack was suddenly fuming.

"That commentator, Bart Oliver! He doesn't represent public opinion.

He just poisons it. Adam Link is inferior to humans, he says like a lordly judge—"

"Perhaps I am," I said. "After all, I'm just wires and wheels. Metal junk strung together. Perhaps—"

But something had struck Jack, forcibly.

"Perhaps, nothing!" he interrupted. "There's a way, by God. If we can get a tide of public opinion in your favor, Adam, we'd have a wedge in Washington." He looked at me a moment. "Will you let us put you in the public eye?"

Jack went on eagerly. "Sports is what I mean. We'll display your strength and skill in sports. And with it sportsmanship, determination, and what they call 'heart'. All those human qualities are best brought out in sport activities. Adam, old boy, you're going to make the headlines in a new way. What's today—hah! The Indianapolis Memorial Day Race is next month. I have connections. I'll get you in as an entry if I have to commit murder!"

Irrepressibly Jack made plans. His idea was sound. I would that way win human will and sympathy first, then official recognition.

THE Indianapolis racing classic took place.

The jam-packed stands blurred by, hour after hour, as I drove my special car around the oval track. Eve was at my side, as my mechanic, pumping oil by hand to the laboring engine.

We felt supreme confidence in ourselves. In my private car, a powerful one, I had often driven over a hundred miles an hour. I hit 160 here on the straight stretches, and not much less on the curves. I had no worry over a tire going and losing control. Electrons and electricity motivate my brain and body, give me speed and power of a superhuman degree.

There wasn't any competition. I led the field. There wasn't even danger, except twice when I overtook the racers so far behind, gaining laps. I swung past them one after another, timing the dangerous moments with hairline accuracy. I am a machine myself. Driving another machine is sheer child's play.

"We will win, Eve," I sang above the grinding roar of our motor. "They are so slow and weak, these humans."

"Not all of them," Eve said. "The man in car five—Bronson is his name, I think—has been taking curves faster right along, in the attempt to catch us."

A great moment of danger came. One car skidded on a curve, cracking into another sideways, and both rolled over and over across my path. I was just passing the field again.

There was only a split-second of time. No human could have avoided crashing into them. Tires squealing, our car swerved for the only opening in the jam.

"Adam! The man—you'll run over him!"

One of the unfortunate drivers had catapulted from his wrecked car in front of me. He might be alive or dead. If I hit him, he would certainly be dead.

The stalled car was in our way. I knew, in avoiding the man, I'd have to take my chances with this. I did what I could. When we struck, it was a glancing blow. Any human would have had the wheel ripped out of his hands. My alloy fingers tightened like a vice. The gears of my arms gave a screech of unyielding protest. I held firm. We went on, safely, except for two blown tires.

Stopping in the pit for a quick change of wheels, we went on to win the race,

still far ahead. Bronson was second, breaking the track record himself in the magnificent attempt to catch us.

OIL-STAINED, grimy, so tired he could hardly stand, Bronson grinned at us. "Great race," he said simply. "Better man than I am, Adam Link. You deserved it."

Before the race he had scorned to consider us competition. Some of the other drivers, crowding around, muttered. Had the race been fair, since I won so easily?

"Shut up," Bronson told them. "We had our laughs before we started, over Adam and Eve Link thinking they could win. A couple of tin monkeys, we called them. We got to take our medicine now. Besides, I saw him take a skid, to miss running over Henderson. Adam Link might have cracked himself up. He takes first money and no beefing."

The crowd had taken the announcement of my victory in a dead, chilling silence. They were hostile. The announcer asked me to say something over the public-address system. I didn't.

I handed Bronson the first-prize check. I didn't need it; we had plenty of the money I had earned as a business consultant in the past.

Jack, on the judges' stand beside me, nodded. "Take it, Bronson. You really won. There isn't a driver on Earth could beat Adam Link."

The crowd burst out in cheers, over this. I knew what it was called—sportsmanship. I had won a point, after all, in my campaign to prove I was worth human status!

Or had I?

That evening, the papers used 72-point headlines. ROBOT WINS CLASSIC. METAL MAN DEMON DRIVER. INCREDIBLE RECORD SET BY ADAM LINK. And more significantly — TIN MAN AND MATE STEAL SPEEDWAY CUP.

Under the latter heading, it said: "Why not run a man against a car? Adam Link was bound to win. It might have been a fairer contest if Adam Link had gamboled around the track himself, machine against machine!"

More cutting was the column under Bart Oliver's byline:

"Adam Link won the race, but not public acclaim. He tried to, by 'magnanimously' turning over the first-prize money to Bronson. Sportsmanship? I think we all see through it as a spurious act. He was told to do it, undoubtedly, by his manager. Adam Link himself would never have thought of such a human gesture in his cold, metallic mind!"

Bart Oliver had appointed himself my Nemesis. I could see that. He was ruthlessly determined to misinterpret everything I did, as so many others had since my creation. But now I had a truly formidable enemy, one who swayed large masses.

I wrote a rebuttal. "I, Adam Link, am a robot, but I have a human mind, not a cold, metallic one. Ever since my advent, certain yellow journals and their paid mouthpieces have dinned against me constantly. The latest is Bart Oliver. I wish to point out that he represents his own opinion, not everyone's, if there is any fairness in human minds!"

It appeared in Oliver's syndicated papers, under the heading: "Adam Link's Manager Pens Rebuttal in Robot's Name . . ."

CHAPTER III

Adam Link, Champion

STILL we went on with our planned course. Jack took me to Chicago,

to the American Bowling Congress.

I entered the singles competition. As with the Speedway interests, the tourney officials eagerly accepted me. It helped their business. The place was packed. When my turn came, I picked up a ball. My metal hand is almost like its human counterpart, with articulate fingers and telescoping joints. I inserted my thumb and middle finger in the holes.

I stood for three seconds. In those three seconds, I had calculated mentally exactly how long the alley was. And how to make all the pins fall. A hit between the one-and-three or one-and-two pins would do it.

I had seen the other bowlers take a run, prior to casting the ball. I needed no run. I stepped to the foul-line, my metal feet clattering loudly against the hard floor. I swung my arm back, then forward, with my sharp mechanical vision on the one-three pins.

The ball sped straight and true, for a strike. I had used such force that three of the pins flew into the next alley. Thereafter I toned down the speed. Twelve times the ball rolled down, for strikes. It was simple. The crowd watched in breathless wonder.

"A perfect game!" Jack yelped. "The first time you ever bowled and you make a perfect score!"

On the spur of the moment, he added: "Adam Link will now try to bowl two more perfect games, ladies and gentlemen!"

"Jack," I protested to him in a whisper, "there's no need for that. No need to flaunt my powers."

"Publicity!" Jack whispered back. "Or can't you do it?"

He was suddenly a little appalled at what he had so blithely announced. No human bowler had ever scored three perfect games in a row.

He breathed a little easier as I rolled another perfect game. Straight as an arrow the ball always went, for the one-three pocket. To me, it is as ridiculously easy as a cannon always casting its shell in the same place.

ON the last game I had Jack hang his hat in front of my eyes. Thus I rolled blind. But, standing in a certain position, my rolls were just as accurate, so long as I did not move.

But when the last ball sped down the alley, a yell went up.

Jack took his hat from my eyes, and I saw one pin still remained standing. It was the ten pin.

"Adam Link," said a bowler who had bowled on the adjoining alley, "you were 'tapped.' "

"Tapped?" I queried in puzzled tones.

"Yes. Fate does that to all bowlers. The ball hits the pocket for a perfect strike, but by the merest of margins, the pins do not hit each other properly, and one pin remains standing in defiance of all the laws of motion."

But nevertheless, with a score of 899, I was Adam Link, bowling singles champion of the world.

I refused the cup. I was satisfied to be the uncrowned champion. Again, as at the Speedway, the crowd cheered this as a gesture of sportsmanship.

"Have you anything to say—to your public?" asked one of the reporters covering the tournament.

I caught instantly that term "to your public." Was I winning a permanent place in the public consciousness—as a personality?

"I have only one thing to say," I returned. "I wish to become accepted as a human being, not as a robot. All my thoughts and reactions are human."

"Boy, that's news!" yelled one of the reporters. "Metal man claims he's sensitive soul underneath it all."

It was a rather heartless thing for him to say. The other newsmen caught their breaths. You could say something like that to a well-known man who was used to public ribbing. But could you say it to an enigmatic being of hard metal who had the strength of ten men in one arm? One or two men involuntarily stepped back.

"Yes," I said. "I bruise easy but I heal quick."

My flat mechanical tones sound the same no matter what I say. It was seconds before my repartee caught.

"My God," said the reporter, grinning. "Adam Link has a sense of humor!"

I PULLED Eve to my side, as more pictures were taken. Eve femininely wiped away an oil-stain at my hinged shoulder, and turned her shinier side to the lens, to look her best. I think the reporters recognized it for the eternal woman, robot or not.

As I turned away, I accidentally struck one of them in the ribs, knocking his breath half out.

"Oh—pardon me," I said quickly. He seemed still more startled at the words. Courtesy from a robot!

Something more significant occurred as we left the place. A black-haired man with bushy eyebrows came up.

"I put some heavy money on you, Adam Link. You came through for me. I bet two to one you'd cinch the singles championship. Made up for what I lost at the Speedway, betting against you. Just between you and me, what're you going in for next?"

He was holding a wad of thousand-dollar bills in his palm, surreptitiously.

I pushed the bribe away, immediately comprehending. "You mean you want to know what I expect to win in next? So that you can make money unfairly?"

Jack pushed in front of me. "Look, Brody," he said icily. "You can bet as you want. We're not selling anything. Understand?"

Jack pulled me away. "Jim Brody," he explained. "Big betting-combine behind him. He was probably figuring on buying an interest in you, or wanting to fix things his way. We're having nothing to do with that sort of thing."

"Can I print that?" One of the reporters had been within earshot. "I won't mention Brody's name. Jobs are scarce! But I'll play up Adam Link's honesty, turning down a bribe."

"Good," Jack said eagerly, ready to follow any little advantage. "Play it up. I won't tell any of the other boys. Scoop for you and your paper."

THE sport headlines the next morning ran through their usual variations. ADAM LINK BOWLING CHAMP. STEEL HERCULES ALLEY KING. METAL MAN UNBEATABLE.

I didn't like this. "My physical prowess is being displayed, not my human qualities. Maybe we're doing this wrong, Jack."

"Are we?" Jack queried. "Read the texts."

I noted that the incident was mentioned where I bumped the man and said "pardon me." Also the rejection of the cup—sportsmanship again. I was quoted for my wish to be thought of as a human. I was given credit for a sense of humor, with my quip. Eve was mentioned as "primping" before the camera, like any human girl. And most important, the following, by the reporter who had overheard.

"Adam Link *isn't* human. He turned down a bribe!" After detailing the incident, the writer finished more seriously: "Honesty is a basic human quality. If nothing else, Adam Link

has that."

"You see?" Jack said. "Sports are a perfect medium for bringing out things like that. In contrast to your tremendous strength and skill, the human things stand out like white against black."

I was not as confident as he was, especially when the evening papers came out.

Bart Oliver's syndicated column said:

"What a cheap way for Adam Link and his sponsors to attempt to show he has integrity! The whole incident was very likely a stunt, bribe and all. Adam Link, as a mechanism, knocking down pins like a machine-gun, is a marvel. But Adam Link as a human being, turning down a bribe, cracking wise, and saying 'pardon me' humbly, is an utter myth. A phonograph could do the same."

I should have known my singling out of Bart Oliver as an example of yellow journalism would increase his enmity. I began to see my campaign had only begun. That I would not easily be accepted as a human in mind, though a monster outwardly.

Jack was furious, of course. But then he shrugged.

"We'll go on. Slow but sure, public opinion will swing our way, in spite of his kind. We've got to force the issue, through publicity. Let's see—there's a tennis meet next week. How are you at that, Adam, old boy?"

There was a knowing smirk on his face. He had played with me.

CHAPTER III

A Challenge

I WILL pass over sketchily the many following events. We barnstormed the sports world. In the tennis matches, I won against the highest-ranking player in straight sets.

In golf I achieved a score of 49 on a par-72 course. Three times I drove from one green to another for a hole in one. The rest of the time I landed the ball within a few feet of the cup. An expert golfer takes account of the wind, when he swings his club. But he doesn't see clearly, in his less mathematical mind, a graph showing the exact course the ball must follow through the air. Nor is he able to make allowance, as I did, for the differences in air density as the ball arcs up and then down again.

In archery after a few trials to acquaint myself with the weapon, I was able to split one arrow with another, like the legendary Robin Hood.

In skeet-shooting, I ran an unblemished score to 500 and gave it up as a waste of ammunition, for I saw I would never miss.

In weight-lifting, I hoisted 5,000 pounds a foot high. Eve and I tossed a thousand-pound dumb-bell back and forth like a ball.

At a track meet, in an open-air stadium, I ran the hundred-yard dash in 5.4 seconds. But Eve did it in 5.3. She is a little quicker than I at the start. I recall the papers playing it up, banteringly, as a reversal of masculine superiority.

We ran the mile in 93.28 seconds. We set a high-jump "record" of 10½ feet, and a broad-jump of 41 feet. In the latter event, we did not dare exert our full powers. When we land our 300 pounds of weight, it jars through our whole mechanism, threatening to disrupt vital parts. As it was, Eve went head-over-heels, cracked her skull-piece against the ground violently, and was "unconscious" for five minutes. I was frantic till she came to and answered the endearments that come as naturally to me as to any man seeing a loved one

hurt.

"Is Adam Link really human in mind?" commented one paper over that. "He all but wrung his hands while his metal mate lay knocked cold."

"Another spurious reaction," wrote Bart Oliver. "His 'heart' is an electrical distributor, giving off sparks of electricity, but certainly not of human emotion."

And so it had gone all along, pro and con. Was Adam Link human? Or was he simply a thinking engine? And always the yellow journals, led by Bart Oliver, maligned me. Branded me with such epithets as unhuman, subhuman, pseudo-human.

WITH his flair for the spectacular, Jack managed to stage an exhibition baseball game, the proceeds for charity. The pitcher for one team was listed as Adam Link, the catcher Eve Link. The rest of our team were minor-leaguers. The opposing team were of major-league all-stars.

"Have you ever pitched before?" they asked me.

I shook my head.

"We'll murder you!" they predicted boisterously.

I was a little startled till I realized it was part of baseball jargon.

The first man up waited confidently. They knew of my machine-strength, and success in all other sports, but baseball was different. I was against a skilled, powerful team. I sped the first ball down. Too low, it was called a ball. The second was too high. The third too wide.

But then I got the idea, and shot the fourth ball straight over the plate. *Crack!* It went into center field. Luckily, it was caught. The second man up watched two of my pitches go straight over for called strikes, then swung at the third. Like a bullet, it came at me and struck my frontal plate with a resounding clang. It might have killed a man. It bounced up from me and came down in my hands. Two out. The batter, having rounded first base, turned back, disgruntled. Any human pitcher would have been forced to dodge the ball and let it go into center field for a hit.

The crowd was roaring. Adam Link could be hit! He was not so invincible in baseball as in all else.

The third man up crashed the first ball over my head. That is, it would have gone over my head except that I leaped up ten feet and caught it in my left hand. The first half of the inning was over. The major-leaguers, passing me on the way to field, grinned.

"We'll bust you wide open next inning!" they cheerfully informed me. And this time I knew they didn't mean wrecking my metal body and strewing its parts around.

AS our side, at bat, went down in one-two-three order, a voice called me from behind the dugout, where I sat with Eve and Jack. We approached the man.

"Brody!" said Jack. "What do you want?"

The gambler's beetle-brows were drawn together in a frown. He addressed me. "Look here, you going to win this game or not? The way you're starting, they'll run up a score next inning. And your men won't get a run from their pitchers. Bets have been hard to get except at ten-to-one. If you lose, I'm cleaned!"

"So what?" Jack snorted, stalking away.

I thought of deliberately losing, to teach Brody a lesson. But I didn't. The first inning had been experimental. Now I knew the exact range of the plate, the behavior of a ball in flight,

the timing of their swings.

I looped my arm around. The ball spanked into Eve's hands almost instantly. I don't think the umpire really saw it, but he sensed it had cut the heart of the plate, and he called a strike. Again the ball whistled down. On the third throw, the batter bewilderedly swung. The ball was in Eve's hands before he even started the bat around. The two following men swung courageously, but belatedly. It was speed they had never seen before.

Thereafter, they went down in one-two-three order, each on three pitched balls. With their slow reflexes, they had no chance. It would be a no-hit game. Eve and I came to bat in the third inning. Swinging experimentally at the first two balls, I sent the third one into the center-field bleachers for a home-run. Eve duplicated my feat. We repeated in the sixth inning, pounding the balls out of the park entirely.

The game was a farce. While I pitched, the men back of me sat and lay on the ground, with nothing to do. They laughed and made biting remarks to the futilely-swinging All-Stars. I could sense tempers flaring. At the end of the sixth inning, thoroughly humiliated, the All-Stars attacked their taunting rivals.

And they attacked me.

"Damned tin gorilla!" I heard, and then bats were pounding at me from all sides. I had heard baseball players were rough and ready men. But they actually had murder in their eyes, splintering their wooden clubs against me. One crack against my skull made me reel.

"Stop!" I bellowed. I wrenched a club out of one man's hands and snapped it in half, in my hands.

THEY all saw. Anger went out of their eyes, and fear came in. They backed away.

"No, I won't touch you," I told them quickly. "But you're poor sports."

"Poor sports!" shrilled back one man. "We don't have a chance against you. You've just been showing off your cheap strength, you tin sport!"

That epithet was singularly appropriate, from their viewpoint. That was all it had meant to them! Cheap exhibitionism, rather than strength and skill under the control of a humanlike mind. They looked on me more or less as a dancing bear or remarkable puppet, rather than a mental human! I looked at Jack. Our campaign was backfiring.

"Yes," agreed another voice. "You've been trying to prove you're a human being, Adam Link. All you've proved is that you're a machine!"

It was not a baseball player who spoke. Part of the crowd had swarmed onto the field. Among them was a slouching figure in a black fedora hat, with a sharp nose and cynical eyes. He stepped forward.

"Bart Oliver!" Jack said in recognition.

This was the man who, more than any other, opposed me. Who had taken it upon himself to deny me human status, like a one-man Vigilante Committee. He had led the yellow journals like a pack of wolves after me. I looked upon him as you would look upon a man who tried to run you down with a truck.

He was staring at me with deep interest, his first sight of me at close range. "I came here," he explained, "to look you over. I think it's about time we met. What's your game, Adam Link? What are you after?"

"Game?" I asked.

"Don't act innocent," he drawled cynically. "You've been trying to display human qualities. Why?"

"Why don't you lay off him, Oliver?"

snapped Jack. He was warning me with his eyes not to answer.

But I did. I decided to chance all on a direct plea. I addressed them all, players, reporters, crowd. And therefore the world.

"Listen to me. I have tried to show, through sports, that beneath my machine-power are the human things. Eve and I are as human as any of you here or elsewhere. Our kind can be useful, in industry, as thinking machines. As pilots, drivers, laborers, mechanics and in the laboratory. Robots will do only good, never harm. I swear it. But future robots must not be slaves. I am the first of the robots."

I looked around at the intent crowd. "I want to become a citizen," I finished.

The human faces before me were stunned. It was my first public utterance to that effect. They looked at me queerly, as though the thought were inconceivable. Just as Dahlgren had looked. I suppose the effect was something like a car or animal asking for citizenship.

Bart Oliver seemed less startled than the others.

"I thought so," he murmured. He swung on the crowd too. "Adam Link wants to become a citizen; *and to vote.* But in the first place, he hasn't proved he's entitled to human status. I still claim he's inferior to humans in all factors—even physically!"

He went on to explain his astounding statement.

"Under suitable handicaps, a human will beat Adam Link. Suppose, for instance, that he ran a really gruelling race, like a cross-country run, without stopping for repairs, and with a governor within him to keep his speed at ten miles an hour. Would he win? Would he possess enough determination and courage to stick to his task?"

My phonic voice came out quickly. "I accept the challenge!"

CHAPTER IV

The Race

TWO weeks later, I was at the starting line with five long-distance runners. Eve checked me over carefully. Fresh battery, central distributor sparking evenly, all rivets and bolts tightened, joints oiled. I was ready.

Jim Brody, the gambler, approached us before the start.

"You going to win, Adam Link?" he asked me, with all the querulousness of a child.

I answered truthfully. "I don't know. If I break a leg cable, I lose, under the rule of no repairs."

Brody looked at me speculatively. "I've made some money on you, Link. The odds are ten-to-one that you win, because you won in everything else. Suppose you lost? And suppose I collected ten for one, betting *against* you? I'd make a mint. And you can have fifty per cent—"

"Damn you, Brody!" I said. It was the first time I'd ever used one of the swear words you humans do. I used it because it was the only way to make myself clear. "I'm going to try my best to win!"

He left, with a gleam in his eye. I knew what he thought—that I would lose. My very choice of words encouraged him in that belief. Frankly, I wasn't sure of myself. It would be a real grind. A marathon. Five hundred miles of rough road. I had never before tested my powers over so long and hard a stretch. I was not made like an automobile, for just such a purpose.

The race started. Within a hundred miles, one of the five men I was racing against had pulled steadily ahead of the field. He was Rikko, a Finn. I kept

up with him, at his side.

Four official cars followed. In one rode Jack and Tom and Eve. In the second, Rikko's manager and helpers, with blankets and food. In the third, the official time-keepers. In the last one, news and cameramen, and with them Bart Oliver.

By the rules, although I did not need sleep, I had to apportion eight hours out of twenty-four to "rest." During such times I talked with Eve.

"Rikko is running his heart out," she said. We both realized it took a great spirit to run against a tireless machine.

"I must too," I said. "The country is watching. Washington is watching, Tom says. If I lose, Bart Oliver will have proved his point—that I am inferior to humans. And he will have made us the laughing stock of the world. Our citizenship hinges on the outcome of this race."

BRODY approached me when 300 miles had been run. Rikko and I had kept abreast all the time. The gambler had evidently followed in his car. He looked worried. With him were several hard-looking men.

"Look here, Link," he grated. "Our money says you lose. All of it. You better lose—or else!"

Once, four gangsters had emptied their guns at me, without effect. "Are you threatening me?" I scoffed. "You forget I'm a metal man."

They left, muttering.

All went well till the end of the third day. The ceaseless jarring and pounding had had its effect on me, but nothing serious. A slight twist on my right knee-joint, making me limp a little. And a tiny short-circuit above my distributor, which manifested itself in my brain as an annoying throb. Pain, you might call it. If the symptoms did not increase, I was safe.

Yes, this marathon was a true test for me. If I won, I would be every inch a champion. The human machine, though weak compared to me, is a marvelously smooth mechanism. It has lasting power. But have you heard yet of a car or engine that kept up a steady pace without little things going wrong?

* * * *

THE MORNING of the fourth day, something struck my eye, far to the side. A highway ran at right angles to our prearranged course along a country road. A car sped down it. A mile beyond, a train rumbled and would soon cross the highway.

Mathematical distances and measurements integrated instantly in my mind. I saw the car would smash into the train. I swung my chest-plate open, unhooked the governor, and leaped away.

"Adam, you fool—" came Jack's startled yell, from his car behind me.

"Come on, Eve!" I bellowed, as she jumped out. She followed instantly, aware of the impending tragedy.

Together we raced down the highway. The car was doing 80. We did 90, like two metal Tarzans chasing a wild beast. We caught its rear bumper and strained to hold it back. Our 600 pounds told. The driver felt the drag, saw he couldn't make it, jammed on his brakes. The car screeched to a stop five feet before the locomotive as it thundered past.

Eve and I said nothing to the driver, white-faced and sick now that he saw how close he had been to death. He had learned his lesson.

Returning, we found the race stalled. Rikko had stopped to watch, and all the others.

"You've broken the speed rule, Adam Link," the racing official said. "I'm sorry, but you've forfeited the race!"

"Wait," Rikko muttered. "I don't

think that's fair. Let him go on."

A magnificent gesture. Then Bart Oliver stepped up. I saw the gleam in his eye. He wouldn't allow it. He would insist on the forfeit, laugh us to scorn for our mock heroics, kill our chances for citizenship at one stroke.

"Let Adam Link go on," Bart Oliver said tersely. He was looking at the train vanishing in the distance. "That was a 'stunt' that could never have been planned."

FIFTY miles to go!

Fifty miles of excruciating torture to me. The strain of catching the car had aggravated the twist of my knee-joint. I had a decided limp. Also my sparking system was worse. Static charges battered within my iridium-sponge brain. I had what in a human runner would have been rheumatism and a frightful headache.

No repairs. No corrections. I could only stumble along. Worse, it rained, and all my joints stiffened for lack of fresh grease.

At the last rest-stop, Bart Oliver grinned.

"Have you got a fighting heart, Adam Link?" he jeered. "Jack told me you must be feeling what amounts to pain. Now you know how a human runner feels, with aching muscles and sore bones. And only dogged determination to keep up the grind. Don't think Rikko is feeling any better. He's been running a terrific pace. And grandly. He has a fighting heart. Have you, Adam Link?"

And suddenly, it occurred to me that he was right. Rikko was dog-tired, strained, haggard. He had not said a word. And how much courage it must have taken to pound along, hour after hour, trying to beat a machine! Racing what must have seemed a hopeless race, knowing my smooth power.

Fighting heart. *Sisu,* as the Finn himself would have called it. That something in humans that keeps on against all odds, in all phases of life. Did I have it in my metal makeup? I perceived that Bart Oliver was not wholly the cynical human prude I had thought him. He had put before me the greatest test of my life. The test that would really prove my human qualities or not.

I kept on, though my "headache" became a crashing roar of static in my skull. My twisted knee jarred through every atom of me, as a sprain might jar a human body with sharp jolts of pain. My stiffened joints called for every ounce of strength in me, to keep up the pace.

I staggered on, rattling and clanking as if ready to fall apart. There was danger of that too. And of the short-circuit intensifying and exploding my whole brain.

The city was ahead, where the finish line lay. Crowds now lined the way, watching the last stretch. Win, win, win!—my mind demanded relentlessly. I could still achieve a sprint and win. But what about the valiant Rikko? He was fighting, too, like me.

If I let him win, ignoring what Bart Oliver would do to me, the betting-combine behind Brody would collect an ill-gotten fortune. That wasn't reasonable. There was only one solution. Side by side I ran with Rikko.

We crossed the finish line in a *tie!*

We both collapsed on a patch of grass, unmindful of the cheering crowd; Rikko panting, sweating, myself grinding internally and sparking with short-circuits at every joint.

Rikko grinned and extended his hand. We shook hands, man and robot. It had been a great race.

Bart Oliver stood over us. He peered down at me strangely. He had been

looking at me like that, in the last part of the race, since the train episode.

"You could have won, Adam Link. Why did you make it a tie?"

"As a symbol," I answered. "To show that robots and humans strive for the same goals. To show that Adam Link, champion, is only a man."

I arose, facing him, extending my hand.

"A man?" he echoed. He didn't take my hand. "No, you can't be a man beneath it all. I can't be wrong!"

He stalked away, as stiffly as I might have. I had been unreasonable to expect a change of heart in him.

CHAPTER V

A Kidnaping!

AN hour later I was in a machinist's shop, being repaired. I gave the man instructions on what to do. My knee was straightened. The annoying shorts were eliminated and my static headache left.

Jack was jubilant.

"I think we've done it! The crowd really cheered you at the finish. The man you saved at the train reported the incident. 'Adam Link for Citizen,' a lot of them yelled. I don't think even Bart Oliver and his gang of human snobs can turn the tide. Bart Oliver is furious. He has been shown up. Other papers are laughing at *him* now!"

Adam Link for Citizen! Was it rising, a swelling chorus that would reach the ears of Washington?

My thoughts suddenly b r o k e. "Where's Eve?" It occurred to me now that I hadn't seen her since right after the race.

Tom came in. "I've been looking for Eve," he said. "While the crowd was cheering, I didn't hear anything, but she talked to someone and left. Read this note. It was delivered to me by a newsboy."

The note was in Eve's precise handwriting, but scrawled as though done in haste. "Adam, dear. A man told me that if I wanted to surprise you, I could have my citizenship papers immediately. He is from Washington. I am going with him. He says it is important. Eve."

Jack showed no elation. Instead his face was frozen.

"The whole thing's phoney," he cried. "Washington officials wouldn't play a childish game like that. Poor Eve, she's too innocent to know the difference. Someone wanted her away." He put a hand on my hard metal shoulder to warn me. "She's been—*kidnaped!*"

Lightning thoughts went through my mind.

"Bart Oliver, of course," I reasoned. "He's so utterly determined to prevent our citizenship that he resorted to this. But he worked through someone else. Who?"

"Jim Brody," Jack supplied. "I see it now. Brody wants revenge, for losing what amounted to a fortune. The tie cancelled all his bets. One of his men contacted Eve, lured her away. They must be miles away now, in a car."

"They can't harm Eve," I said, "and sooner or later she'll see through it. She'll leave them and come back. They can't stop her. Not even a dozen of Brody's men with machine-guns. I only hope she doesn't hurt them!"

WE waited, at a hotel where Jack had registered. When Eve returned, someone would direct her to us. Checking, we found that Bart Oliver was not registered in any hotel in town. Nor Brody. It all added up as we had figured.

But Eve had not returned, by nightfall.

Instead, a special delivery letter came to me. It was simply addressed: "Mr. Adam Link," without a street number. Everyone in town knew me and where I was. I tore it open, read it at a glance, and handed it to Jack.

"Adam Link. If Eve Link is worth dough to you, collect $300,000 in unmarked twenties. Wrap it in a package and bring it to one mile past route 41 where it meets 23A. You come *alone*. If you bring any cops, forget the whole thing. She can't move or get away. You got till midnight tonight. If you don't come through, you'll get a bunch of junk by mail, like with this letter."

Something had fallen to the floor, when I took out the note. I picked it up. It glinted in the light. It was Eve's little finger, crudely sawed off with a hacksaw at the base. There was no blood, or pain connected with it. But just the same it made my thoughts grind savagely.

"Wire for the money, Tom," I said. "I'll go alone. No police. I'll come back with Eve and the money. They're dealing with Adam Link!"

"Adam, you mustn't—" began Jack, a little horrified.

"Don't worry," I said. "Bart Oliver and Jim Brody will land in jail—unharmed."

Jack nodded. "They haven't got a chance against you. You're ten times as quick and strong as humans. And practically indestructible." He added, as an afterthought, "But still, how did they subdue Eve?"

* * * *

A FEW MINUTES before midnight, I passed the junction of routes 41 and 23A, some thirty miles from town, in open country. I had run all the way. It was a dark night. There was no traffic. Both routes were uneven county roads, little used.

I waited in the appointed place. Finally a car with dim lights slowly came from the opposite direction. I stood clearly visible, shining in the starlight. The car stopped and six men stepped out, heavily armed. They shone flashlights in my direction, to make sure I was alone.

"Adam Link?" one called. "Throw the package of money toward us. Then scram. Eve Link will return to you later."

I prepared to obey. I had brought the money, knowing those who received it would lead me to Eve. My idea originally had been to follow the car. But I thought, why not eliminate these men now?

"Listen," I told them, "your game is up. I'm coming forward. I'm a metal man. Your bullets won't harm me. Give up quietly and lead me to Eve."

I stepped forward. Their guns raised threateningly. Bullets could harm me, hammering into my eye-sockets, but I wasn't worried. The distance between us was a hundred feet. I had run the hundred-yard dash in 5.4 seconds. I could close this gap in two seconds, if they shot. I'd wrench the guns out of their hands before they could aim.

I took three steps. Did they think they were a match for Adam Link, champion?

My feet clattered loudly. I didn't hear the quick footsteps behind me. I hadn't known that one of the men, planted here, had waited for this emergency.

Something descended against the back of my skull-piece with a resounding clang, metal against metal. My brain was stunned. I fell to the ground. I was paralyzed for the time being, almost unconscious, as Eve had been that time at the track meet. It had been a

heavy blow with a metal bar.

One man had wrenches in his hands. With skilled fingers, evidently a mechanic, he unbolted my neck-piece! Before I could regain my full senses, he had reached in with a cutter and snipped the locomotor cable from my brain to the relay system of muscle cables.

I was helpless. It is like a man having his spine clipped in two, with no more control over his limbs. I was alive from the neck up, dead from there down!

They had not been fools after all. And I had been, to underestimate Bart Oliver. I wondered what lay ahead.

THEY carried my inert mass of metal to their car and drove off. I was carried out, eventually, and into a deserted old house, still out in the country. Eve lay there, on a table, as helpless as I was.

"Eve!" I called. My vocal apparatus still worked, being separate from the locomotor system.

"Adam dear!" she returned. "Forgive me! If I hadn't been a fool to come with them—"

"Never mind, darling." Too late for recriminations.

Jim Brody stood over me, his black brows frowning. I looked around for Bart Oliver. He wasn't there. Naturally he was too canny to be in this business in person. Perhaps he was on his way east already, to his office and home. What orders had he left, to prevent Adam and Eve Link from becoming citizens?

Destruction?

"Thought you were a wise guy, eh?" said Brody harshly. "Making the race a tie. If you'd lost, like I told you, I'd have cleaned up a cool million in bets at ten-to-one. I'd have cut you in. Instead, you double-cross me. You thought I was bluffing, about the 'or else.' Thought I'd be afraid to tackle a robot? Well, tough guy, look where it got you!"

I didn't say anything. I was waiting to hear Bart Oliver's final disposition for us.

Brody pulled a fat individual forward, with beady, avaricious eyes. He was dressed in a sort of uniform, boots and leather trousers.

"Here you are, Colonel Hatterson," Brody said. "Are they worth ten thousand to you? I got to get something out of this."

"Yes, indeed! I'll disguise them as human, and bill them as the Talking Heads. It will be a great sideshow attraction. My circus will make money!"

WITH a clever showman's aptitude, Colonel Hatterson tricked us up as human heads, with wigs, plastics and cosmetics. Horrible-looking, decapitated heads, with gashed plastic necks plainly in view. We were on a stand. Wires led secretly below to batteries, to keep our brains and vocal cords in operation. Our bodies, entirely removed, had suffered an unknown fate.

Day after day the gaping, milling, awestruck circus customers stared at us in thrilled horror. A spieler outside lured them in.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Come in and see the Talking Heads! The only two in the entire world. Guillotined from their bodies, they are kept alive by a miracle of science. They live, they talk! You may ask them questions and they will answer. They are as mentally alert as ever before!"

Braver souls in the audience asked questions.

"W-what is—uh, was your name, s-sir!"

If I tried to answer "Adam Link, the robot," the attendant behind me would

press a key, shooting an electric spark into my iridium-sponge brain. Excruciating torture, like a knife thrust into a naked human brain.

"Pierre Marquette," I always answered. "I was guillotined in France, five years ago, for the murder of six men with an axe. My wife, Fanchon, too. A great scientist took our heads and kept them alive."

My voice, mechanical as it is, was just the sort the crowd would expect — dead of inflection, sepulchral. Shivers of horrified delight went over the stupid souls. They believed it.

"D-do you eat?" someone would inevitably ask.

"Yes, my appetite is unimpaired." At this point the attendant would pour milk between my plastic lips, to drain down a tube out of sight below the stand.

"How do you feel? Are you h-happy?"

"Of course." I always said that stupendous lie, by instruction. "This is an easy life. I have no body to worry about, which is a nuisance anyway. I am fed well, sleep well, and have nothing to do. I recommend that you all have your heads chopped off!"

I had ad-libbed the last line into the spiel myself, without objection from my masters. I meant it. And so it went, day after day. Stupid nonsense.

Easy life! It was sheer purgatory, to Eve and me. All we could do was think of our hopeless predicament.

The circus was a small one, touring rural sections of the south. Jack and Tom were probably not even searching for us, assuming we had been destroyed by Bart Oliver and Brody. They might be trying a hopeless court battle now, but with no chance to convict Oliver and Brody for wanton destruction of Adam and Eve Link. There were no *corpora delictorum*.

Worst of all, we saw the headlines in some of the papers carried by people who viewed us. ROBOTS STILL MISSING. WHERE ARE ADAM AND EVE LINK? CITIZENSHIP AWAITS LOST ROBOTS.

Citizenship awaited us! And here we were, freaks in a sideshow. Crushing irony! Soon the hubbub would die down. Adam and Eve Link would be forgotten, like a fantastic dream. Colonel Hatterson would continue making money. He was unconcerned over our fate. He looked upon us as clever mechanical toys, not living minds.

DAY after day, the bug-eyed simpletons, their driveling questions, the unending monotony. I've heard of man's inhumanity to man. This was man's inhumanity to robots.

And what of future robots—if there were such?

Suddenly the whole robot question assumed a new light, in my mind. If by a miracle we escaped from this—

But we wouldn't. I was certain of that when one day I saw a face I knew, in the audience. The sharp-nosed, saturnine face of Bart Oliver! He struggled to the front row and stared at us. He was here to check up, make sure we hadn't escaped somehow.

He stared at us closely. His face, well-schooled, didn't show that he was gloating, mocking, triumphant, but I knew he was. To add to our torment, he asked a question.

"What is your name?"

"You know damn well—" I wanted to shriek, but only got the first word out before the spark bruised my brain. "Pierre Marquette. I was guillotined —"

"Are you human?" Bart Oliver interrupted.

It was a new question. Apprehensive of the searing spark, I made a care-

ful answer. "Yes, of course. Or I was, with a body."

"Have you ever heard of—Adam Link?" he snapped.

He was trying to make me give the wrong answers, so that the man behind me would use the whip of his spark. Inhuman devil, that Bart Oliver was! I didn't answer.

"Adam Link!" he insisted. "Eve Link! Tell me, have you heard those names?"

He was leaning forward, his face strange, wondering.

"Damn you!" I bellowed. "Go away and let me alone. You know I'm Adam Link—"

This time I got it out, though the spark crashed into my electronic currents three times. It was like three bombs bursting within my skull.

"Adam Link—it's you!"

With this cry, Bart Oliver motioned to three burly men behind him and leaped on the platform.

"You're under arrest," Bart Oliver barked at the attendant. "And your boss, Colonel Hatterson. These two heads are heads of Adam and Eve Link, disguised."

He ripped away my wig, snapped off my plastic nose so that the metal shone through. Two of the detectives returned with Colonel Hatterson.

"Where are their bodies?" Bart Oliver thundered at the quaking circus owner. "Do you know you've unlawfully held two future citizens of the United States in captivity?"

Eve's voice came to me. "Adam, dear, it's over. Bart Oliver is our friend!"

Only then I knew I wasn't dreaming.

THERE is little left to tell. We were reconnected to our bodies. Colonel Hatterson hadn't harmed them, perhaps hoping some day to train us as astounding acrobats.

Bart Oliver had come in a chartered plane. We flew toward Washington. He had sent a telegram to Jack and Tom to meet us there.

"When you vanished," he explained, "I was puzzled. Jack and Tom accused me of the deed. To clear myself, I accused Brody, but we couldn't get anything on him. You had completely disappeared. Well, in the last three weeks, I had about given you up for lost. Then I got the clue. My clipping service combs the country for odd facts, for my column. I saw the item about the Talking Heads, in a honky-tonk circus troupe. I suspected it might be you, and came."

He looked at us a little embarrassed, then stuck out his hand.

"You know," he grinned, "you gave the right answer when I asked you back there if you were human. You said yes! If apologies mean anything——"

"Don't," I said. "It's even. For three weeks Eve and I thought *you* had sent us to the circus. But tell me——"

"Why I accept you as human?" he asked. "I knew it the moment I met you. I felt it. I was just fighting myself. I think all of us feel it when we meet you, Adam Link. We look in our mirrors and realize our fleshly bodies are just as much an illusion as your metal one. Only the mind counts."

He smiled wryly. "There I was writing my daily column, condemning you from my lofty seat without taking the trouble to meet you. I wonder if the whole world isn't that way all the time? It isn't till we meet something face to face, and look at what's beneath, that we begin to understand. Well—"

He shrugged, and then his tone became eager. "I've been trying to make amends. The whole country is aroused, in favor of you. I think we've even got Washington softened up——"

I began to say something, but stopped. We were landing at the airport in Washington.

Jack and Tom were there and Dahlgren. Dahlgren looked at me and spoke. "I came with Jack and Tom to intercede directly in Washington, after hearing you were found. By the way, this is Senator James Willoughby, from Dr. Link's state, where you were created. From *your* state!"

He pulled the distinguished, white-haired man forward.

"Adam Link, it's a pleasure!" Senator Willoughby said in courteous greeting. "I hereby grant you honorary citizenship in our state immediately. And I'll bring the matter of your true citizenship up before the Senate itself! I was skeptical, following your campaign. But now I see the worth of robots, or robot-citizens. You will be given citizenship by Congressional order. I promise it!"

"That's that!" Bart Oliver grinned. Jack and Tom clutched at each other as though about to execute a dance.

"Except for one thing," I said slowly. *"I don't want citizenship!"*

It was like an exploding bomb. They all looked stupefied. I went on,

"I had a chance to think, during those three weeks helpless in a circus. Robots would be exploited, in ways I can't even foresee. Their voting power, for instance, might be turned to unscrupulous ends. The time is not yet."

Strange conclusion, but wise, I was sure. I didn't want to say what I really meant, and truly startle them. We had all forgotten one thing. Turned out like buttons, robot-citizens would one day *outvote* humans! Perhaps for the better. Perhaps not. It was a new problem. Eve and I would have to think about it.

Mirrors of

by DON WILCOX

THE elevator reached the top floor of the Buffler Tower, my Uncle Jonathan Buffler's skyscraper, and I stepped out. I had come at the urgent and mysterious request of my uncle's doctor, Merrill Ramsell.

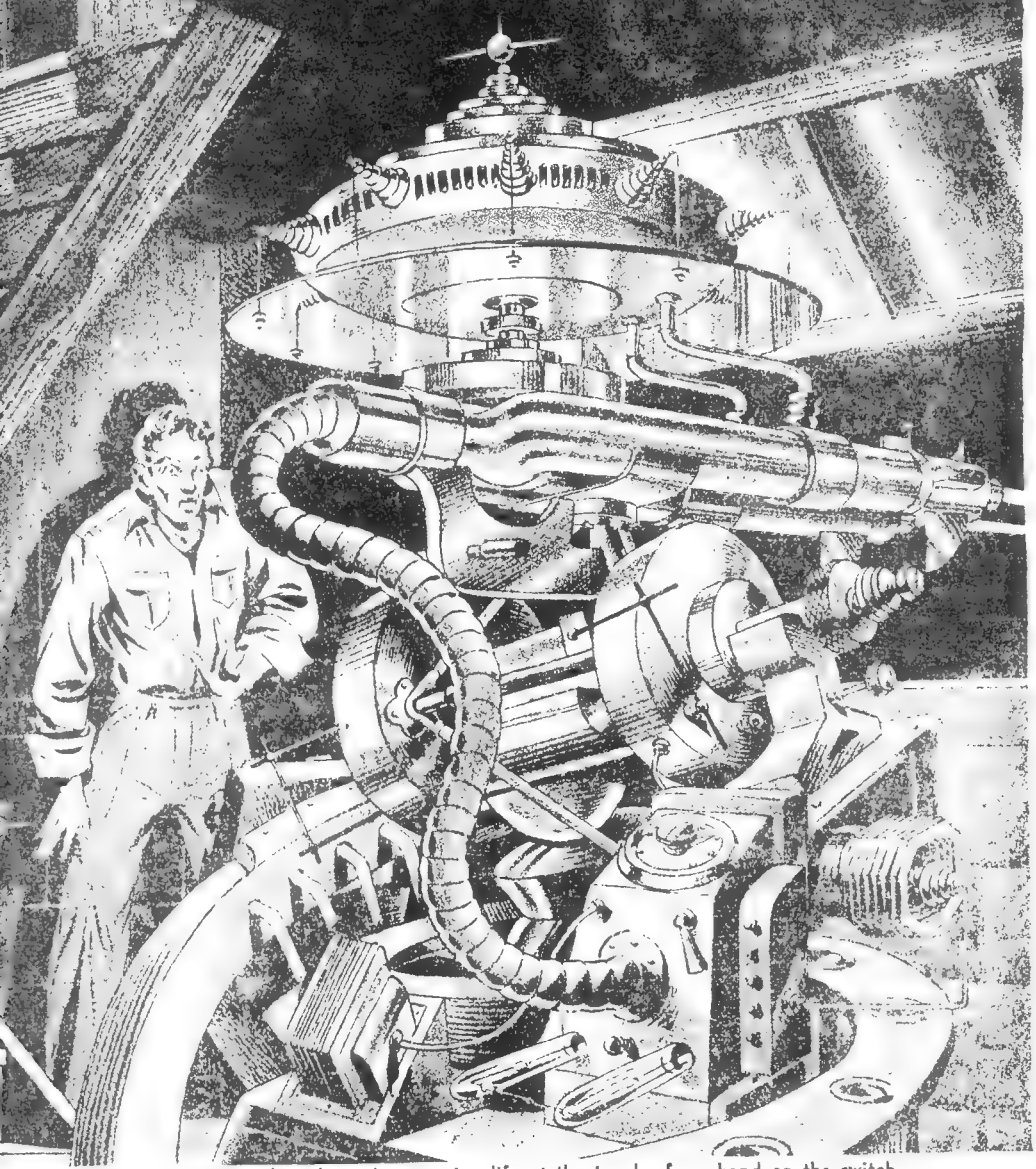
"What the devil—!" I gasped as my eyes swept the octagonal hallway.

I whirled to the elevator boy for an explanation, but he only shrugged his shoulders and went down. My eyes turned back to the walls that faced me. Each wall was a mirror, and each mirror turned gently from side to side on a vertical axis. In each mirror was a reflection of me, facing myself with a dizzy expression, swaying back and forth like a clown on a tight rope.

I glanced at my multiple self once more to make sure my several suits of

Madness

It seemed a mad thing when Buffler had his offices transformed into a maze of mirrors. But he had a sinister motive



The machine burst into roaring life at the touch of my hand on the switch

new college-cut clothes were right for this momentous visit, and then struck off down the narrow avenue of mirrors. Dr. Ramsell had advised me to see him first.

In a cluttered office heaped with books and walled with medicines I met Dr. Ramsell. First I saw a pair of black slender shoes propped on a corner of the table; next, the thin grayish fingers that held a massive black book with bold white letters on the cover, "Schizophrenia."*

Up from behind the book came a high bald head and a yellowish white face, with a sharp thin nose and spectacled eyes that shone black and lively.

"I'm Dr. Ramsell," he said in a good voice that was much younger than his face.

"I'm Jim Olin, Buffler's great-nephew," I said. "You wired for me to come."

"Yes." He put the book down solidly and shook hands with me. "I sent for you on my own initiative. You needn't tell your uncle. He'll think you've just dropped in of your own accord. He *may* be glad to see you. I say *may* because I've found he's never predictable.

"But you, as one of the few inheritors to his fortune, should have a personal interest in his welfare while he lives. Maybe you can do him some good—both mentally and physically. Frankly, I'm getting nowhere. He insists on keeping me, but he resents my efforts to probe into his case."

"Is there something seriously wrong with him?" I asked.

"Has anything ever been right with him?" the doctor retorted, tapping his thin fingers nervously along the white letters of the word "Schizophrenia."

*Schizophrenia—A form of mental derangement, characterized by the simultaneous presence in the mind of contradictory ideas, resulting in inaction or the simulating of qualities which one does not possess.—Ed.

I turned his question over in my mind and didn't find any very positive answer. I had never had many contacts with Uncle Jonathan Buffler. Several years had passed since I had last seen him.

"He's made his wad of money," I answered. "I've heard that he imports the finest oriental rugs in the world, and that his own rug designs are tops. I always supposed he was a sort of genius."

"There. That's fine!" Doctor Ramsell exclaimed. "Run right in and give him the glad hand, and make him out to be as wonderful as you can. It won't do any harm. Maybe you'll get next to him if you're willing to stay a few days."

"He'll be surprised. He doesn't know I'm coming—"

"Never mind that. You're his great-nephew and you've come to visit for a week or so. Mind you, not a word about me. I'll talk with you later."

I WALKED on down the hallway chuckling to myself. 'Likely as not Jonathan Buffler was up to something freakish, if harmless, that had set this doctor to worrying.

I recalled that Buffler used to dismay Aunt Mary by climbing up on a stepladder to throw pieces of colored cardboard down on the drawing room floor. Then he would study the effect, and if it pleased him he would have his artists copy the design for a rug.

But usually he would try for hours without getting any but the most terrible results, and his poor wife would be driven to a nervous frenzy.

Before I reached Uncle Jonathan's office I was almost in a nervous frenzy myself. The wobbling mirrors all along the hallway were, to put it mildly, disconcerting. On each side of me were regiments of myself walking abreast—

not steadily, but wavering and trembling and jumping and jittery.

"Mr. Buffler—er—Uncle Jonathan?"

The large corner office was semi-dark. The mahogany Venetian blinds were nearly closed, admitting only a few hairline strips of reddish forenoon light that jumped capriciously from one swaying mirror to another.

The one person in the room sat behind the huge mahogany desk which angled across the corner. From his humpty-dumpty silhouette, I knew that person was Jonathan Buffler. His pear-shaped head and round shoulders gave a startled jerk at the sound of my voice, and his shadowed face glared at me.

"I'm Jim Olin,"I said. "I've dropped in for a visit."

Buffler's thick lips twisted into a scowl, but before he had time to snarl aloud one of his telephones rang. To my surprise his voice, which was naturally guttural, sounded off creamily.

"Yes, Jewel, this is Johnny . . ." His head turned so that I couldn't see his face. "I was just about to call you to say 'good morning' . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . But I did call you twice, only you hadn't come yet, Jewel . . . Angry? Of course not, Jewel . . . I know you were out late last night, Jewel—but you were in good company . . . Ha-ha-ha! . . . But you'd better get to work now . . . Those orders, you know . . . But I'm still your boss, you know . . . No, Jewel, I really didn't mean that—"

I should have walked out on this custardy talk if I hadn't been so stunned by it. There was something arresting in witnessing this bulbous, heavy-jowled man, owner of a skyscraper and head of a wealthy importing business, talk in such a lovey-dovey manner—and obviously he was enjoying himself.

Once he interrupted himself to mutter, "Damn that light!" and jerked the Venetian blind cord to cut off the lines of red light that played over his telephone hand.

Jewel, whoever she was, evidently knew exactly what to say to put him in a cheerful mood. But the conversation struck an uneasy note before it ended.

"But Jewel, don't you pay any attention to old Drizzlepuss. We're not going to let *her* stand in the way of our happiness . . . Yeah, why *don't* I fire her! We've been over all that before. But *just you wait*—"

Here he broke off abruptly, as if suddenly remembering that I was present.

"I'll talk with you later, Jewel. Don't forget tonight."

HE hung up and turned his eyes on me glowingly.

"That was Jewel, my Number Two secretary," he said. "Nice girl. Splendid girl . . . M-m-m-m— where were we? Oh, yes. You're Jim Olin. How are you? Sit down over here and tell me all about yourself."

I took him at his word. He lit a cigar and laid his head back in a listening attitude while I gave him a brief account of myself—how I had quit college and taken up a job that involved some foreign travel. He blew smoke so blissfully that I was sure his mind was still on Jewel.

I concluded my monologue with, "So I just thought I'd drop in for a few days' visit with you and Aunt Mary."

He removed the cigar with startled suddenness and shot a cold glance at me. By this time my eyes were accustomed to the dim light. There was something chilling in the glare of his protruding white eyeballs. The glare also came from eight or ten different mirrors. These, like the mirrors in the hallways, were tilting back and forth, slowly but incessantly, as if the very breathing of Jonathan Buffler made them restless.

"Light ever bother you?" Buffler asked abruptly. In the walls of mirrors the white glaring eyeballs continued to swing through gentle arcs.

"Sometimes," I said. "White light, especially."

The answer pleased him. "Excessive light is very bad for the eyes," he said authoritatively.

"Very," I said, certain that I was on the track of his friendship.

"You've noticed it?"

"Often."

"Many people suffer from too much light and don't know what's wrong. With me, the suffering amounts to illness. A tangle of light vibrations torments me. But that damned doctor of mine, you can't tell him anything. No matter how I suffer, he just shrugs his shoulders."

By this time I had settled back in the red leather chair—but not comfortably. The mirrors were too disturbing. Even the ceiling was alive with moving mirrors—four circular ones, each with inverted Jonathan Bufflers rocking back and forth over my head. I began to feel seasick.

Tightly stretched cords were visible here and there between the mirror frames, and silent little electric motors tucked around in obscure corners tugged at the cords to give the mirrors their tireless motion.

"A sort of interesting place you've got here," I ventured noncommittally.

"*I* like it."

"Plenty of mirrors all around."

"As far as they go. But I'm having more installed in some of the other offices. They're a great scheme to reduce the tangle of light vibrations your eyes have to contend with."

"Tangle?" I asked. He had used that term before.

"And *what* a tangle! What a helluva tangle!"

He moved his chair closer to me, as if to confide something dear to his heart.

"I'm telling you, Olin, when you stop to figure it out mathematically, it's enough to drive you mad. The way light waves crisscross—"

He paused to answer a telephone. "New rugs to inspect?" His voice was all business. "Never mind, I'll get to them later. I'm in conference . . . No, I'm not to be disturbed!"

BUFFLER hung up and resumed his confidential manner.

"See here, Olin, when you examine the facts, you suddenly wake up and realize the truth. Light is the most confusing thing in the world. It's man's deadly enemy. It stabs him from all directions. It's merciless. Every second it bombards his most sensitive organs, the eyes. Undoubtedly it causes half the world's fatigue. Maybe three-fourths. I've got some mathematicians at work on that. Look, I'll show you!"

His plump hand reached for a desk pen filled with white ink, and he made a tiny white dot on a scratch pad of brilliant purple.

"Now you take a simple point of light," he said, "the finest point you can imagine. It's shooting into your eye at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is."

"You *know* it is. Oh, they may dope out some variations, but that figure is close enough. In other words"—he tapped me on the knee—"for every full second you look at a tiny white point, how much light does it poke into your eyes? A hundred and eighty-six thousand miles of it! In one second!"

I grunted helplessly and decided this lecture had gone far enough. I was getting seasick or light-sick or Jonathan-Buffler-sick, I wasn't sure which.

"Pardon me, Uncle—"

"Wait, here's the point!" Buffler commanded, tapping white ink dots on the purple paper. "Every smidget of white light from a rough surface, like this paper, diffuses in a million directions. Look, I make rugs—"

Here he rose and tossed a colorful oriental rug sample onto the desk. The sample was a foot square, with hundreds of silky threads stringing out from every edge.

"I make *big* rugs." He filled his humpty-dumpty frame with a proud breath. "Big rugs that contain thousands and millions of colored fibers woven together. *But*—the most intricate rug ever made is *simple* compared to the tangle of light waves that comes from these few white dots! Now, do you get it?"

"Yes," I said, " but I'd better—"

"No, you don't get it," he said in a wise and patient manner. "The point is that these mirrors cut down the tangle to something simpler. They don't diffuse. They reflect the light directly. Oh, it's still complicated enough to drive the average person distracted, but at least it's *some* simpler!"

"It's the darned wobbling of those mirrors that drives *me* distracted," I said.

Buffler drew back in horror, and I realized too late that I must have crushed his pet idea to the earth.

"I'm surprised, Olin," he said in quiet injured tones. "You're as bad as my office help. *You'd* rather have shafts of light burning into your eyes from a single direction. Not *me!* I learned my lesson from the rolling seas, from race tracks, from movies, from prize fights. Our eyes hate monotony. They love motion—action—rhythm! But how can you have it in an office? I have found the answer: moving mirrors!"

"I'm sorry," I apologized. "I didn't realize—"

"*You* may not appreciate my discovery. The doctor doesn't. Old Drizzlepuss Becker doesn't, nor the rest of them. But *Jewel*—" His harsh voice softened.

"Pardon me, Uncle Jonathan," I said, walking determinedly to the row of telephones, "but I must call Aunt Mary and tell her I'm here."

AGAIN the quick glare of those two protruding white eyeballs shot at me from a score of mirrors.

"Your Aunt Mary is dead," Buffler snapped.

"Dead? Since when?"

"Nearly a year ago." He tapped his puffy fingers nervously. "Heart failure. I supposed you knew."

I apologized for not keeping in closer touch with family happenings and expressed my sympathies as best I could. But plainly he was impatient to get on with his discussion.

"About these light waves," he resumed. "I've bought some new calculating machines and hired some mathematicians—"

An office boy interrupted with a message from a mirror salesman.

"He's in the lobby waiting for the order you promised him for today."

"Good," said Buffler. "Tell him I'll be ready in a few minutes."

The boy went, and Buffler picked up a telephone.

"Drizzlepuss?" he growled. "Come in and pick out your mirrors . . . I don't give a damn what you want or don't want. I'm putting tinted mirrors in your office. If you want to pick the tint, come in."

The receiver clicked down and an instant later "Drizzlepuss" stormed in. She was tall and angular and thoroughly belligerent. Her black eyes snapped and her thin nostrils flared.

"Buffler, if you call me Drizzlepuss again—"

"You'll what?" Buffler snarled.

"I'll *expose* you! That's what I'll —"

"Shut up, dammit!"

The high-pitched rage in Buffler's voice must have made her realize that someone else was in the room. She caught me in the corner of her eye and for an instant she froze. Then she reached out and jerked the cord to a Venetian blind.

"Why don't you get some light in here?"

She made the rounds of the windows and the noon light blazed in. Buffler's eyes narrowed and I expected him to blow into an explosion of fury. But he didn't. He turned to me calmly.

"This is Becker, my Number One secretary," he said, and with rankling sarcasm added, "a pleasant little person. Becker, my great-nephew, Jim Olin. Now, Drizzlepuss, about these tinted mirrors for your office—"

I ducked out and strode down the corridor to find the doctor. It was high time he and I had a confidential talk.

CHAPTER II

Jonathan's Jewel

REENTERING Dr. Ramsell's room, I carefully closed the door behind me.

"All right, Doctor, I've seen him," I said. "I'll admit he gave me plenty of pains I couldn't locate. What does it all add up to?"

"Maybe murder," said the doctor enigmatically, without looking up. "Maybe insanity. I'll discuss it with you shortly."

He remained engrossed in a book for several minutes. I sauntered to an open window and I looked down toward the wealthy residential section of the city.

From this height I could pick the Buffler estate in the bend of the river that passed the edge of the city. The red tile roof of the mansion, almost two miles distant, stood out distinctively from this vantage.

"Come," said the doctor. "We'll go to lunch and thrash this thing over. Oh, by the way, here's an interesting volume on symbolism."

From his numerous books dealing with different types of psychoses, he picked up one and opened it to a picture — a reproduction of an intricate pen and ink drawing.

"A bit of art done by a patient at a mental hospital," he said.

I studied the picture and praised it. It was a Spanish market scene with a wealth of carefully etched detail. But not until the doctor pointed it out did I see the skull cunningly hidden among the shade-covered cobblestones. Then I saw the mark of the Spanish Loyalist that adorned the skull.

"The artist," said Dr. Ramsell, "went to infinite pains to draw that picture, just so he could plant that one symbol. His particular mental disorder happens to be based on a fear of his enemies. His fight against the Rebels came to a bitter defeat, and he saw many of his comrades shot down. But here he gets a secret feeling of victory out of representing his enemy as a death's-head being trodden underfoot."

"An elaborate lot of art for one small trick," I commented.

"Exactly. That's a curious but typical thing about many such cases," the doctor mused. "Incidentally, Jonathan Buffler's mirrors are a pretty elaborate lot of art, too. I only hope they may serve as a safety valve, in his case."

We went down the elevator a few floors to a cafeteria, where we found a suitable corner for carrying on our

discussion. By this time my thoughts seemed as crisscrossed as the fibers of a rug—or even the light waves from mirrored walls.

"Then you think," I ventured, "that all these mirrors have a purpose other than saving Uncle Jonathan's eyes?"

"Uncle Jonathan's eyes—rot! His eyes are as healthy as anyone's, when new rugs come in to be looked over. His suffering is just a front. So are the mirrors. Like the picture of the Spanish market.

"But that secret purpose — the death's-head — the victory over the enemy—that's what I'm looking for in Jonathan Buffler's mirror mania. And I want you to help me find it. Have you seen either of the females?"

"Becker," I said. "But I noticed a plump blonde with black eyelashes when I passed a room marked 'Secretary Number 2'. Could that be Jewel?"

"That's Jewel. All play, no work. Both eyes on your uncle's money. All right—here's how the jigsaw fits together. Your aunt died not long after Jewel came to work for Buffler. I wasn't connected with Buffler at that time, but I've heard that the coroner and a few other officials held their breaths for awhile until that incident blew over. I have reason to believe that your Aunt Mary Buffler died under strange circumstances."

RAMSELL'S tone brought my appetite to a sharp stop. I laid down my fork. I only listened. And with every word, I caught a clearer picture of Uncle Jonathan as Aunt Mary's murderer!

"Whatever those circumstances were," the doctor continued, "I'm sure, from the indications Gertrude Becker has given me, that she knows. Perhaps she has proof of that murder. At any rate, that is the source of her power over Buffler. She holds a whip hand over him. She stands in his path as solid as a prison wall."

"Prison wall!" I echoed under my breath.

"And that wall has begun to frustrate Jonathan Buffler more every day. It won't let him have the one thing he craves more than anything else."

"Jewel?"

"Jewel," Ramsell replied. "Jewel expects to marry Buffler's wealth. But Gertrude Becker forbids him to marry her."

"Why?"

"Because Becker has worked for him for twenty years or more, and much of his success is due to her good business judgment, not his own. Now Gerty's just stubborn enough and proud enough to send him to prison before she'll let him dump his wealth into the lap of a cheap gold-digger."

"Is Becker in love with him too?"

"I've often wondered," said the doctor. "Whether she is or not, in *his* mind she's simply an obstruction—a wall—between him and what he wants. And Jonathan Buffler is used to having whatever he wants."

I mused over the matter, and the doctor nervously finished his lunch.

"She's a wall," he repeated, his lively black eyes snapping. "She's a wall that he hates, because walls aren't easy to dissolve. *But*—you can always make a wall *seem* to dissolve *by hanging a mirror over it!*"

I must have stared at the doctor for a full minute. All my solid thoughts on this problem suddenly jumped out from under me. I turned these last words over and over, trying to make sense out of them. Gertrude Becker was a wall. Buffler hated her. So he dissolved her — *symbolically* — by dissolving all walls. That, at least, was the doctor's theory.

Very impolitely, I laughed. Somehow I couldn't quite swallow such a theory at first taste. I felt a childish impulse to poke fun at it.

"If Gertrude Becker is the real wall he wants to dissolve," I said, "why doesn't he hang a mirror on Gertrude?"

The jibe disturbed the doctor not in the least.

"It wouldn't surprise me if he did," he retorted, swallowing the last of his coffee.

"Or," I pursued, winking to myself, "if he finds it awkward to hang a mirror on her, why doesn't he just hang *her* and be done with it?"

"You're going to be a great help," said Ramsell with a smile that stung me. "But for all your facetiousness, you've hit close to the real thing."

He looked at me steadily and I felt the perspiration break out over my body.

"In other words," he said, "whether Buffler has yet faced it consciously or not, the set-up is perfect for him to resort to another murder."

MY spine went cold. A chain of possibilities leaped through my mind. A fortune at stake. Becker fighting to save it. Murder hovering over her. The doctor plunging into the fight—and the great-nephew arriving on the scene—and what might happen to *him?* I tried to pull my thoughts back to something solid and tangible.

"But—but the mirrors—the safety valve—" I mumbled.

"If my theory is correct—and I'm not too confident that it is—the mirrors may act as a subconscious outlet for awhile. Buffler may even hide his worst intentions from his conscious self for a time. But sooner or later—"

The doctor rose from the table and gestured, palms outward, as if to say that anything might happen.

As we returned to the top floor I assured Dr. Ramsell that I would respect his confidence and would cooperate in every way possible.

"For the present there's nothing to do but stay around for a friendly visit," the doctor replied. "Of course you mustn't seem to be watching him. But if my suspicions are well founded you'll probably see the signs before it's too late. After all, committing a clean murder isn't as simple as purchasing rugs or installing mirrors. Keep in touch with me. We may find that my theories are groundless. I hope to God we do!"

For the rest of the afternoon I loafed around the offices and the rug display rooms, letting the matter turn over in my mind. I stopped in and had a chat with Gertrude Becker about the weather and the high cost of living, and left her in a fair humor in spite of her upset over the mirrors, which were already being installed in her own office. Becker was a pretty decent sort, regardless of her ill-suppressed feud with my great-uncle.

Late in the afternoon Uncle Jonathan and I became fast friends. I listened to his pet peeves about light rays — listened my way right into his heart. He even took me through some of his offices on the next floor below, where a battery of new calculating machines was busily multiplying the number of cones in the fovea* of the human eye by the number of seconds of time, and these by the billions and trillions of light waves which the eye must encounter going to and from work.

*The most sensitive area on the human retina is a small *yellow spot,* which has a central depression (the *fovea centralis*) in the middle back part of the eyeball. No rods but only cones are found in this *fovea centralis.* No fibers of the optic nerve overlie it, and upon it the image at which the eye is directed is focused for acute vision.—Ed.

The review of the calculating activities, however, had a depressing effect upon Uncle Jonathan. He came away with new pains in his eyes, and he suddenly announced that he was almost too ill to be on his feet. We trudged back to his darkened office and he dropped weakly into his chair.

Then Jewel came in, her blond hair bouncing and her darkened eyes flashing with anger and her carmine lips drawn hard. I took one look at her and buried myself in a newspaper and was forgotten.

"So that's what you think of me!" she snapped at Uncle Jonathan.

"Now Jewel," Buffler protested in his lovey-dovey voice. "Don't be that way."

"But you did it deliberately, Johnny. I'm jealous. I've got a right to be." She gored him with her sharpness. "You deliberately gave that woman her first choice of the tints—and what about poor me? Poor me gets left out in the cold."

"But Jewel, you wouldn't want pink-tinted mirrors in your office."

SHE plumped down in a chair and sulked.

"I certainly would! Pink is my color. You know that. And yet you give all the pink mirrors to old Drizzlepuss."

"Jewel, dear, be reasonable." He tried to stroke her hand but she jerked it away. "You can have any other tint you want, just so every office is different—that's the way I contracted for it."

"Then change your contract!"

"You can have blue — green — amber—"

"Just because she's your Number One secretary, and I'm Number Two—"

"Jewel, stop it!"

"You don't love me, Johnny, no you don't, or you'd let me have my way!"

The quarrel got worse as it went on, and I took a nod from Buffler as a sign for me to leave. I obeyed reluctantly, for the profanity was just beginning to get good, and I had never heard a female who was more of an artist at it than this Jewel.

* * *

THAT evening as the chauffeur drove Buffler and me along the river drive toward the red-roofed mansion, I perceived that my uncle was in a terrific turmoil.

"She may walk out on me," he shuddered, as if the thought filled him with deep terror.

"Then you didn't give her the pink mirrors she wanted?" I asked.

"No, dammit, the pink ones were already installed in Drizzlepuss's office. I made Jewel take green." He sighed painfully. "It's a helluva thing to break a little girl's heart over, ain't it? But that's what I've done."

CHAPTER III

Death in the Night

FROM all appearances my uncle was a very sick man. He had me fix a blindfold over his eyes and read the evening paper to him, while he lay on a bed and suffered. At length he said he believed he would sleep, and begged me not to waste my evening taking care of him. The yellow roadster in the garage was mine to use as long as I cared to extend my visit, and I might as well enjoy myself.

Unpredictable. That's what Doctor Ramsell had said of him, and the doctor was right. Jonathan Buffler's hospitality was so much greater than I had expected that I *should* have been suspicious.

I drove out of the garage and through the driveway with my eyes on the bright

lights reflected in a pink glow over the skyline. I could see Buffler Tower, one of the nearest tall buildings, rising stately into the darkness. The majesty of that building was impressive; it made me stop and wonder whether I had the proper appreciation for its owner.

As I skimmed along the pavement, that wisp of sentiment kept tickling my mind, and it was the thing that made me turn around and go back before I had reached the city's bright lights.

"This is no way to do," I told myself, "running out on my uncle the first night of my visit, after the warm welcome he's given me. There'll be other nights to run around."

So I zipped back to the red-roofed mansion, thinking to myself what a lonely place it must be, now that Aunt Mary was gone. It was, in fact, almost a deserted place; for Jonathan Buffler had dispensed with all his servants and kept only a houseman. Perhaps he was lonely, misunderstood, in need of a companion—even such as Jewel. I could not believe he had murdered Aunt Mary.

I ran the roadster into the garage, and the doors slipped closed quietly at my touch. As I walked toward the porch steps a faint flash of light issued from along the side of the house—a curious quick flash that caught my curiosity. Impulsively I went toward it, puzzled because it had come from near the ground.

The flash did not come again, nor did I see anyone with a flashlight. All I found was a basement window with a piece of glass broken out of it. Through the break came a very faint glow of light from a basement room. I concluded that the flash I had seen must have been nothing more than an electric light switched on and off by the houseman.

The voice of Jonathan Buffler, however, rattled through the basement room. This somehow punctured my sentimental picture of him. For I had been expecting to find him still in his bed, perhaps wishing there was someone to bring him a drink of water or read a book to him. The voice I heard was vigorous and hearty, not the voice of a sick man. I bent to the window.

I couldn't see much through the aperture, for it was almost completely clogged with the ends of two tubes that pointed through the window. I had the sensation of looking down a double-barreled shotgun.

But being interested in the state of Jonathan Buffler, and not in shotguns, I paid scarcely any attention to the pair of poised tubes. I was vaguely aware that they were connected with a hodge-podge of mechanism which cluttered a large share of the dimly lighted basement room. I was vaguely aware too, that some of that mechanism was electrical, and that all of it was new and gleaming.

But those observations were largely unconscious. It was Jonathan Buffler that I was curious about, and it was Jonathan Buffler that I saw.

"She wanted pink mirrors too, damn her!" came his voice as plainly as if I were in the room with him.

His hulking round form plodded across the floor toward the open door of an adjoining room. He was pouring out his confidences to the houseman, in whose wake he trailed.

"But I'll square things with her after we're through," he added with a bitter chuckle.

"Sure. She'll understand," said the houseman, and their voices were lost in the further room.

SO the old scoundrel wasn't sick! It made me hot in the face to think

how easily he had deceived me. I walked away from the window and struck out along a river path afoot. It was high time for me to pull my slow wits together and think some of these things out.

Was Jonathan Buffler insane—or wasn't he? If he could be too sick to walk—too sick to use his eyes—too sick to keep his date with Jewel, and then within an hour could lose every symptom of that illness, he was either a superb actor or else he was mentally unbalanced. Was it possible that he had become a split personality, living alternately in two different worlds? Had he lapsed into schizophrenia?

I scuffed along the gravel path looking across toward the lights of the downtown skyline that reflected in the river. The three red lights atop the Buffler Tower and its several bright windows kept the scenes of the day turning over in my mind. A few lights on the top floor were burning.

I wondered if the doctor was still up there, poring over his theories. I wondered if the new pink mirrors in Becker's office, and the mirrors through the hallways and in Buffler's sanctum, were still tirelessly swaying.

But most of all, I wondered why Jonathan Buffler, sane or insane, should be sick before me—and not before his houseman.

I sauntered back to the mansion and found that Buffler was again in bed with the blindfold over his eyes. He was awake and I talked with him a few minutes.

"Thank God, I can close out the devilish light with a blindfold," he muttered darkly. "I'm a sick man, Olin."

"Let me send for Doctor Ramsell," I said.

Buffler vetoed the suggestion with a pained oath.

"That damned idiot doctor! He's got no heart! I try to tell him how I suffer, but he won't hear me. He just looks a hole through me, like a hungry owl. I'd like to change eyes with him once and give him a taste of what I endure.

"But hell, you could shoot copper wires through his eyes and it wouldn't affect him any more'n every light ray that shoots through mine!"

"I'm sorry you're feeling so badly," I said.

"Go to bed and forget about me," he snapped. "And sleep late, because I'm not going to work tomorrow. I'm not going to be able."

I trudged off to bed, but not to sleep. This thing had me going now. Jonathan Buffler *was* ill in my presence. That was the thing that stuck in my mind. If he was acting, the acting itself amounted to illness, it was so intense.

Following the doctor's train of thought, I pondered over the blindfold. If this affliction was all psychological, the blindfold must be a subconscious expression of something that Buffler hated to face. But *what?* The memory of a past murder? The conception of a future one?

I snapped on a light and tried to read, but it was useless. Every news story in the paper related somehow to my troubled thoughts. Then my mind reverted to the curious apparatus I had glimpsed in the basement. I put on my clothes and tiptoed downstairs.

The clock struck eleven-thirty. Perhaps the houseman would be asleep by this time. His quarters, I had been informed, were in the rear basement room; and I had no intention of disturbing him with my prowling.

THE door between the first floor and the basement was locked. The clock struck midnight before I finally

found a key, and by that time I was fairly impatient to get on with my venture, and consequently more or less reckless about the amount of noise I made. I walked down the basement stairs and turned on lights as I went.

I stopped, listened, heard nothing. At last I was in the room I had glimpsed from the outside, and a dim light showed me the mysterious mass of instruments. I gazed with an awe that was more than I can define. I felt a mysterious sense of power. Even though I had no more idea than a child as to what all these huge tubes and coils and turntables and levers added up to, I thrilled at their very beauty.

I could see the reflection of my shirt, elongated into a white saber, up the length of the largest metal tube. This brilliant metal pole sloped upward gently, and I noticed that the two small tubes I had seen from the outside — the double-barreled shotgun — were an elongation of this telescope-like piece of metal.

Perhaps the instrument was a telescope, I thought. Bending downward I tried to find an eyepiece, thinking that I might catch a glimpse of some planet or star over the skyline of the city, but my search was futile—and so was my inspiration. For after all, why should there be such a profusion of electrical equipment if this were only a telescope?

The only items I could single out as familiar were the paper-thin plates of colored glass, obviously to be used for filtering out different colors of light, and a hand switch.

My hand was on the switch, but I did not mean to snap it. However, I was suddenly shocked by the entrance of the houseman. I turned with a start, and the switch snapped beneath my hand.

Zwoom-m-m-m!

At once the room was ringing with the quiet hum of motors bedded on concrete. A purple spark sputtered across a gap—the gap widened—the spark crackled and roared—and my eyes winced under the terrific light. Blindly I groped for the switch; then in fear of the thundering delta of electric sparks, I backed away.

I knew the houseman was shouting at me. I couldn't hear a word he said; nothing but his mad roar against the clattering torrent of power.

The houseman's hand slapped the switch off. The roar died away, and the streams of sparks were now only lingering white streaks playing across my dazzled eyes. A hand clutched me across the chest and I dizzily staggered backward.

The houseman's face was the face of a demon. He shoved me against the wall, and from the look of him I believe he would have shot me down if he had had a gun. His arms reached out this way and that, expecting to grab something to club me with, but his search was cut short, for I snatched a crowbar hanging on the wall.

"Lay off me!" I yelled. "Your damned telescope's nothing to me!"

The words halted him—or perhaps the crowbar had something to do with it.

"I'm Buffler's nephew," I said, remembering that the houseman had not seen me at close range before. "If this is my uncle's telescope, I've got a right to look at it."

The houseman looked at me closely, as if trying to size up how much I knew or suspected. He relaxed a little.

"I didn't mean to start off the fireworks," I added. "If I've done any damage, I'll pay for it."

I HUNG up the crowbar and walked to the stairs, and I knew that the

houseman's eyes were following me suspiciously. I glanced at the stairs to see another pair of eyes on me—and Jonathan Buffler's white eyeballs were protruding more than ever.

"Sorry if I've upset your sleep, Uncle," I said, hesitating at the foot of the stairs.

I snatched at the first lie that came to my mind.

"Aunt Mary used to keep some of my favorite books down here in the basement storeroom. That's what I came down to get . . . and then I saw this telescope and thought I'd look at some stars."

My uncle continued to glare at me, and the houseman stood at one side of me with his fists on his hips. Neither one seemed disposed to speak, whatever it was he might be thinking.

"Or *is* it a telescope?" I added.

"It is," said Jonathan Buffler, with a glance at the houseman.

"It's partly a telescope," said the houseman, "but it's chiefly a cosmic ray apparatus. I'll tell you about it some time when we get it working on one of the stars."

"It's out of order now," said Buffler.

"I shouldn't have messed with it," I agreed.

"Stay away from it," said the houseman. "Your uncle makes me responsible for keeping it under lock and key. If it had been anybody but you, I'd have crowned 'em."

"I shouldn't have dug up a key in the first place," I said. "Had trouble sleeping so I came down for a book."

"Get back to bed," said Buffler, and his night-shirted bulk turned and trudged up the stairs. I followed. The door between the basement and the rest of the house locked behind us.

Again I went to bed, but not to sleep. I listened for an hour or more, and at last I heard Buffler slip down the stairs, and the basement door clicked. There was no doubt in my mind that he and the houseman were having an earnest conversation.

* * *

THE thunderbolt struck home the next morning. A telephone call brought the strange news that cut through me like a knife. Shortly after midnight, a scrubwoman had died while at work in Gertrude Becker's pink-mirrored room at Buffler Tower!

CHAPTER IV

Shadows of Murder

THE death of a scrubwoman may seem a very small incident. There was nothing about a scrubwoman's dying while at work to give the police a headache. Nor were the coroner's talents put to any test. The coroner's verdict of death from a heart ailment was accepted without question, so far as I know, by all who knew the woman.

A second telephone call, this time from Dr. Ramsell, assured Jonathan Buffler that there was no need for him to come if he was ill, for everything was taken care of and the office force had gone back to work as soon as the body had been removed.

The death of a scrubwoman was a very small incident. But it was enough of an incident to strike a terror through me—a terror that possessed me, hypnotized me, bound me in invisible shackles.

I sat in my room with my head in my hands, looking out across the river park toward the downtown skyline. There stood the Buffler Tower, a dismal gray shaft pointing up to the leaden clouds, almost obscure in its outline, for there was a fine drizzle in the air this morning.

Lights were on in the city's downtown offices, and I could see the top

floor of the Buffler Tower as a row of dotted lights through the gray mist. Was it possible, I kept asking myself, that an electric eye from this distance could sort out those dotted lights, and choose the one that was pink?

And was it possible that a ray from this distance could leap to those swaying pink mirrors—quartz mirrors that reflected everything they could catch to every inch of surface in the room. I shuddered. In my hand there was a strange lingering feeling—the feeling of striking a lever or snapping a switch.

From Jonathan Buffler's room came a continual low hum of voices. Although my uncle remained in bed with his blindfold over his eyes, he was not too sick to converse with the houseman. This low muffled conversation was to go on for hours—today, tomorrow, the next day—and every hour of their ghastly secret talk was to leave me more and more depressed.

I must have been an ineffectual weakling during those hours. Why I did not call Dr. Ramsell and pour out my direst suspicions to him, I cannot say. I wonder if a hit-and-run driver may not experience the same terror that I felt—a terror that is blinding—a terror that says:

"I didn't do it. I don't know anything about it."

I rubbed my hand and tried to brush the memory of that accidental snap of the switch out of it. But my ears echoed with the roar of purple sparks, and the smell of humming motors was in my nostrils.

A police car moved slowly along the wet street. I thought it was going to stop, and my heart went wild. It came even with our driveway but did not turn in. It disappeared on down the street, but the scare it left upon me was as blinding as the band across Buffler's eyes.

From that moment on, the deadly instrument concealed in the basement room, together with the switch I had struck and the exhibition of deadly power I had seen, all went behind a blind spot in my consciousness. I refused to remember them. For me they were out. . . .

"Olin!" It was Buffler's deep, suffering voice that called.

"Coming," I answered, and with hesitant step I went to his room.

"Read to me," he said. "I may have to lie here for several days, and I'll need you beside me constantly. Find a book and read to me."

I COMPLIED with his order. What I read was of no importance; indeed, I read almost without listening to myself, and I doubt whether he listened. For, as I soon realized, his only purpose was to make certain that I did not leave the house!

For three days I did not leave, nor did I talk on the telephone or have any other communications with the outside world. Not that he forbade me to use the telephone; he simply invented ways to block me. And I, seeing through his artifices, acceded to him. He watched me like a hawk, and I watched him the same way.

As for meals, he had the delivery trucks bring whatever he wanted. As for his business, he barked a few sharp orders over the telephone to Gertrude Becker each day. As for his illness, he flatly refused to have Ramsell or any other doctor meddle with him; and whenever I threatened to override this decision, he cajoled me so cunningly that I let him have his way.

Was I afraid of him? Of course I was! His acting was too superb. I knew he was insane. I knew he might murder me the first time he caught me napping. I saw plainly on that point.

For the one passion that pounded through his arteries was a plump blonde named Jewel, who had cleverly held out for marriage, and who had fed the flames of his agony by completely ignoring him for the past three days—the sickest days of his life, no doubt.

I sat beside his bed, reading to him, watching him, wondering whether he watched me through his blindfold, wondering how he expected to dispose of me. Perhaps I would never know how Aunt Mary had died; but it was clear as crystal to me now that Gertrude Becker, his Number One secretary, would die simply and easily, and that there would be no mystery. The answer would be—"heart attack."

I went to my room, adjoining his, and began a letter to my parents. I had only put down a few words when—

"Olin!" Buffler's insistent call interrupted me. "What are you doing, Olin?"

"Nothing in particular."

"Come here, Olin . . . Did I hear you open that stationery drawer? . . . Are you writing a letter? . . . To whom? . . . Read it to me."

I got up angrily and returned to his room.

"It's private," I snapped. "I don't think you'd be interested."

"Of course I'm interested. Your parents are my relatives. They're to inherit part of my wealth. What are you writing them?" He drew himself up in bed angrily. *"What are you writing them?"*

"None of your damned business!" I retorted.

Jonathan Buffler tore the blindfold off his eyes and sprang up. His bulky form bounced toward me, and his mad protruding eyes caught sight of the letter which I'd been afraid to leave on my desk.

"Give it to me!" he roared.

I backed away from him and crumpled the letter in my fist. He came at me, reaching with his puffy fingers and yelling,

"Give it to me!"

I swung my fist at his heavy jowl. I didn't mean to hit so hard, but fear and hate and physical power are all bound pretty closely together in my make-up, and there was a lot of fear turned loose in the impact. Jonathan Buffler's pear-shaped head gave under that blow, and his humpty-dumpty frame tottered backward on bent knees.

His eyes closed and he groped for the bed, groaning and coughing.

THE houseman came up the stairs, sidled past me and walked across to Buffler's bed. I started to move away.

"Just a minute," said the houseman, "till we see what's going on here. What happened, Buffler?"

The stricken man only answered with long drawn-out groans and shakings of his soggy head that made his thick lips sputter. He fumbled to get his blindfold over his eyes, and the houseman helped him. At the same time there was a quick exchange of whispers. Then the houseman turned to face me and carelessly brought a pistol out of his pocket, which he weighed in his hand.

"All right, Olin," he said in a casual tone. "The old man wants to see that letter you're writin', so cough it up. Buffler's orders are law with me. Let's have it."

I dug the wad of paper out of my pocket and tossed it over. The houseman stuck his gun in his pocket and unwadded the paper. He read aloud:

Dear Mother and Father,

If I should suddenly die and my death should be attributed to

heart attack—

"Well?" Buffler demanded.

"That's all there is," said the houseman.

"The hell!" Buffler sputtered. He slipped his blindfold up on his forehead, turned on his side, and glared at me.

"What are you plotting, suicide? What the hell are you hinting at?"

"Nothing," I said.

"You lie. You're hinting at murder! A *murder!*"

He came up to a sitting position and pushed his weight up slowly with his arms. His voice had come out with a scream on the word "murder," but now as he slowly came to his feet and moved toward me, his talk came forth as a hoarse rasping whisper.

"You're accusing somebody of plotting against your life. You seem to think somebody would take the trouble to kill you. Who the hell gives a damn about putting *you* out of the way? *Who?* Answer me, you damned traitor!"

I had no answer except to edge away from the bulbous maniacal eyes that knifed through me. But the houseman had slipped to the door ahead of me and stood in my path, tapping his pistol against the door frame.

"Answer me!" Buffler roared. "Who'd take the trouble to murder *you?* What have *you* got on anybody?"

"Nothing!" I blurted.

"Don't lie! I can see right through you. I know who you're accusing. You're accusing *me!*"

His mouth spread in a hateful grimace and he pointed his accusing finger at himself.

"You think *I'd* kill you, don't you! DON'T YOU! *ANSWER ME!*"

"Why should I?" I cried.

"Stalling!" he hissed, and a scornful smile touched his lips. "Always stalling. But I can see through you. You think you've got something on me. You think you'll fix up a story for the police. You think you'll get in on my dough in a hurry. You think you'll break up my little party.

"But you won't, damn you! I've had you sewed up since the night you busted in on the ray gun! And NOW —"

His furious screeching broke off at the sound of the doorbell. For a few seconds he stood almost motionless, his hands upraised, his fingers trembling, perspiration streaking down over his heavy jowls. The doorbell rang again. Slowly his hands lifted and his palms pressed over his bulbous eyes.

"I'm sick, Olin!" he wailed, bowing his head. "I'm dreadfully sick. I don't know what I'm saying. Help me to bed. Get the blindfold on me."

His sudden change of mood was so complete as to pass understanding. It was baffling, and yet so convincing that the hatred and terror that had filled me a moment before softened into weakness. I helped him to bed.

The doorbell continued to ring until the houseman answered it. A moment later he came back up the stairs, to tell Buffler that Jewel was waiting to see him down in the drawing room.

CHAPTER V

Jewel's Promise

THE name of Jewel was magic. The light that came into my uncle's face was wonderful to see. A reluctant schoolboy who plays sick until he hears that school is out, so he can go to the circus, could not change his mood any quicker than Jonathan Buffler.

But Buffler did not forget that he was a very ill man. He kept his blindfold on, I helped him dress, and the houseman and I escorted him down-

stairs.

Once in the presence of Jewel, he permitted himself the luxury of removing his blindfold; remarking, as he did so, that the light was killing him.

"You poor dear," said Jewel in luscious baby talk, stroking his eyelids. "You've just got to get well. Your little Jewel has been all sad since you walked out on her—"

"But Jewel, I didn't!"

"You got all huffy and walked out on me, and all I had asked for was pink mirrors in my office. You were an old meany." She scruffed his cheeks playfully and they laughed.

The houseman nudged me and we left them to themselves. But we stayed within hearing, for that was what the houseman wanted to do, and I had no choice in the matter. I was his prisoner.

Jewel's visit lasted for more than two hours. Buffler finally persuaded her to go back to the office. But in the course of those two hours Jewel had done most of the persuading. She had teased and pouted and cajoled; in short, she had applied all her artful wiles that had such a softening effect upon Jonathan Buffler.

It was pitiful to listen to, but in the end she had won her point. She was to have pink mirrors. Moreover, she was to be promoted from Secretary Number Two to Secretary Number One, so there would be no more occasion for her being jealous.

"Mind you," Buffler had insisted, "keep this plan under your hat until I get back to work. I know how to handle Drizzlepuss and you don't. So don't go spilling the beans. I'll be back in a few days to make the change. Until then, don't you breathe a word!"

"Of course not, Johnny dear," Jewel had answered. "You know how to handle Drizzlepuss." A touch of sarcasm came into her voice. "That's why we're getting married one of these days —or are we?"

"Jewel, dear, don't start that all over again."

"Or are we?" Her voice scraped so cuttingly that Buffler might have lost his temper. But instead he had continued to fall at her feet, smoothing her ugly manners with promises and kisses born of his foolish infatuation.

"Promise me you'll forget about Drizzlepuss until I get back," he begged. "As soon as my plan works out, there'll be the sweetest little honeymoon you ever dreamed of. But you've *got* to sit tight until I get back to my office. Promise!"

Those were Buffler's parting words, and Jewel repeated her promise as she left.

The houseman and I helped Buffler back to bed, and for the remainder of the day he was a very sick man. But back of moanings and groanings I could detect a glow of fervor. Jewel had warmed his spirit and set his scheming mind upright. I guessed that he would go through with his dastardly plan as swiftly as possible, and I guessed rightly.

I WAS now determined to break out of my inertia and blow the lid off this thing. Being followed about the house by the houseman and his gun, being denied the use of the telephone, being confined to the house by force—these things had become galling to the limit of my endurance. Moreover, the open break over my letter had brought my danger out into the open. It was high time for me to act.

"Tomorrow noon," I said to myself as I sat alone in my room.

My slow wits turned over every bit of evidence that had fallen into my hands.

"Tomorrow noon Gertrude Becker will die if I don't do something to prevent it," I told myself.

I was sure of the time Buffler would choose. For Gertrude Becker had an old-maidish habit of eating her lunch in her office every noon and allowing no intruders during that hour. Buffler had rechecked this point with Jewel in their recent visit, and I was sure he had done so for a purpose.

"When the motors begin to hum tomorrow noon," I said to myself, "where will *I* be? Buffler knows that *I* know. He let the cat out of the bag himself when he said 'ray gun'. He won't try to cover that up now. His only alternative is to get me out of the way—but how? It won't look good for him to have *two* mysterious deaths on his hands at once."

There was little comfort in that thought. I didn't eat my food for fear there was poison in it. I didn't sleep for fear I would be murdered in my bed. Whenever I had a wild inspiration to dash for a door or a window or scribble off a note to throw to a passing newsboy, I would turn to see the houseman's pistol dangling from his careless hand.

The new day came. The hours crept toward noon. Every strike of the clock struck terror through me. I was pitifully tired and exhausted from loss of sleep and nerve strain and hunger.

Now I sat languidly on the drawing room divan, almost in a stupor, my eyes resting on the gleaming pistol. The houseman seemed to be reading; he held a book of science in his hand. But if I so much as glanced at the pearl-handled extension telephone at the side of the room, his alert eyes were on me and his quick fingers twitched at the gun.

"I'll wait until eleven-thirty," I kept telling myself. "On the stroke of eleven-thirty I'll rush that telephone, gun or no gun."

My muscles grew tense. With every glance at the clock my heart quickened.

"At eleven-thirty I'll make a rush . . . *Or will I?*"

The demon fear must have had a deadly grip on me. I tried to close my eyes and relax, but the cold-faced houseman across the room from me had only to turn a page of his book to bring me up with a start.

The clock struck ten-thirty. On the floor above, Jonathan Buffler was stirring. The clock struck eleven. Buffler waddled down the stairs weakly. He was in his bathrobe, his blindfold was pushed high on his forehead, his flabby face was gray. He paused to look at me. His fat fingers twitched nervously.

He went to the basement door, unlocked it and disappeared down the stairs. I could hear the swish of his bedroom slippers as he toddled through the basement.

THE clock struck eleven-thirty. I sat paralyzed. The houseman looked at me sharply. He must have heard my heart pounding. My heart was a fireball beating back and forth, and my chest and throat were on fire from it. From the basement came faint clicking sounds—sounds that could only be the checking of instruments. The houseman's eyes turned toward the basement door, and in that instant I moved like a fool.

I caught the telephone, jerked it off the hook, dropped it. The houseman was coming at me. I flopped a huge overstuffed chair over myself. In my craze to get a call through, I would have dodged behind anything, even a sieve. It was folly, of course. As my hand reached for the fallen phone, a bullet went through my forearm. The low *crack!* of the pistol echoed through the house.

The houseman was upon me like a cat. I tried to kick the chair against him. He sidestepped and hovered, and the butt of his pistol swung up to strike me. I wanted to lash out with my fist. More than anything in the world I wanted to feel the crash of my knuckles against his jaw.

But nausea swept down upon me and my right hand only clamped over my wounded forearm to catch the spurting blood. Then the rap of the pistol butt caught me on the side of my skull, and spirals of blackness whirled away my consciousness.

CHAPTER VI

Spray of Death

I AWOKE to the hum of motors and the thunder of sparks. I imagined I could even smell the hot coils and see the purple streams of power. *The death ray was at work!*

In utter horror I tried to spring from my bed, but the most I could do was roll. In my grogginess I tumbled onto the floor. My hands and feet were bound. My wounded arm was bandaged clumsily, and it was shooting with pains.

I lay on the floor listening. The electrical roar dwindled and died away. For long minutes there were no sounds. I waited. The clock struck one. Soon, I thought, there would be a telephone call from the office to bring the tragic news that Gertrude Becker had suddenly "died." But the telephone didn't ring, and an hour or more later I learned it had been disconnected.

That hour or more of waiting was uneventful, but it was by far the most excruciating uneventfulness I have ever endured. The two men came up from the basement, and Jonathan Buffler lapsed into his terrific illness. He went to bed and said he would stay there indefinitely. Under no conditions was he to be disturbed by anything or anybody.

"What about Olin?" I heard the houseman ask.

"He'll wait," Buffler grunted.

Then the doorbell rang, and to my agony of waiting was added the shattering news that I knew was coming.

"The telephone girl," began the messenger boy at the front door in a high-pitched voice, "says that Mr. Buffler don't answer—"

"The phone's cut off," said the houseman. "Buffler's awful sick. He ain't to be disturbed. What'd you want?"

"She sent me with a message," said the boy. "I'm to get word to Buffler that his Number One secretary just died. It happened this noon, so sudden that everybody's pretty much shocked, and they thought Mr. Buffler had better be told about it."

"I'll give him the message," said the houseman. "I know he'll be deeply grieved. Come back in a couple of hours and maybe he'll have a message to send back to the office."

The boy left. The houseman came up to Buffler's bedroom to report the conversation.

"I heard it," Buffler grunted, and it was a grunt of satisfaction.

"Okay," said the houseman. "There you are. The big deal's over."

"It won't take long to cover our tracks," said Buffler. "But I'd better dope out a statement about Drizzlepuss Becker. The newspapers may want something. She's been with me a long time, and she's pretty well known. The employees will expect a statement from me. Get me a pen and some paper, and I'll dope out some deepest regrets."

Two hours later the doorbell rang again. The houseman had taken the trouble to gag me in the meantime. If

he hadn't, I'd have shouted to the caller at the top of my voice, for it was Dr. Ramsell. I'd have known his voice anywhere.

"No, you can't see him!" the houseman barked. "He wants rest and quiet and no interviews. But here, I'll give you his statement about Gertrude Becker's death."

"Oh," said the doctor, in a curiously surprised tone.

"Well, do you want to take it or don't you?" the houseman snapped.

"I'll take it—with pleasure," came the doctor's crisp answer. "By the way, where's Olin?"

"Olin?" asked the houseman innocently. "You mean Buffler's nephew that was here a few days back? He beat it for home soon after the old man took sick. Took the train or bus, I suppose. Damfino. Maybe he flew."

RAMSELL said, "Tell Buffler I want to see him as soon as he's able. I'm stalling off the reporters and the police as well as I can, but these two sudden deaths—the scrubwoman and Gertrude Becker—both in the same roomful of pink mirrors, have naturally raised a lot of idle speculations—and some that maybe aren't so idle."

"What the hell! Ain't Buffler's lawyer on the job?"

"Yes, but the lawyer can't answer all the questions that have come up about Buffler's mirror mania. The investigators come to me about that."

"Tell them Buffler's rich enough to have things like he wants 'em," said the houseman. "Maybe he's a bit cracked, but to hell with 'em. What have mirrors got to do with a secretary's dying?"

"I hope to answer that question sooner or later," said the doctor, and with that he left.

The long evening wore on, and for a time it promised nothing but waiting. But I knew now that the only thing that would bring my waiting to an end was death.

I must have been a problem to Buffler, for I am sure that he and the houseman spent a long and earnest hour discussing how best to handle my case. Occasionally the houseman came in to look at me, and each time I felt sure that he had come *for* me; but each time he only inspected the bonds that held my hands and feet, and then went away.

Never did he pay any attention to my bullet wound, for I would soon be dead.

Now I observed that Jonathan Buffler's spirits were rising. That was another sure sign that my fate was completely sealed. Now and then a chuckle of laughter sounded from his room. I heard him get up from bed and dress. Again his illness had conveniently vanished. He went downstairs and called to the houseman to reconnect the telephone. He tried to call Jewel, but her apartment did not answer.

As a drowning man will snatch at straws, I seized at every wisp of an idea for escape that came to my mind. I even debated rolling out onto the roof. But at last I stumbled upon something —dim chance that it was—which absorbed my struggles for half the night. That something was—a heliograph message!

But not a real heliograph. My signaling instrument would have to be the little pocket mirror which I habitually kept in the breast pocket of my suit coat. And my signaling light would be the wall lamp of my bedroom.

Squirming, I drew my rib bones up inside my jacket coat, swelled my chest with air and fought to catch the edge of the mirror against a rib. It was sweating work, desperate work, and I was sure I would never make it. But at last I felt the mirror sliding through

the pocket opening.

My straining body threshed about, finally shook the mirror free. I crawled forward then, inch by inch. At last my sweaty hands felt glass! My fingers clutched at the mirror, and I maneuvered myself until the glass caught the round gleam of the lamp bulb.

Then, jerking my head up as far as possible from the cold floor, I trained the mirror so that the lamp bulb reflection on it would stream through the window opposite me and reach out in the black night to Buffler Tower.

It was almost fantastic that I should hope my "heliographed" message would attract any attention, considering what a welter of city lights filled the blackness. But the later the hour, the fewer the lights, I reasoned; and also the greater my skill.

With infinite pains to flash my dots and dashes at an angle that would catch the mirrors of Buffler Tower, I spelled out the words.

DR RAMSELL DR RAMSELL DR RAMSELL

On the first floor Buffler continued his efforts to telephone to Jewel. Every time the clock struck another half hour, I would hear him mutter the number of her apartment, then after a long wait put down the telephone with a splutter of impatience.

"One more job," I could hear the houseman say. "Let's get it over with. As long as he's alive we're not safe."

"I want to get Jewel first," Buffler would retort, and he would try the telephone again.

BUT between calls I could catch snatches of their conversation, enough to assure me that the houseman was impatient to take care of that "one more job" so he could unmount the ray gun. He was no mere houseman. Unimpressive as he was, he was the scientific brain that had set up this death ray apparatus. Probably he had stolen plans and equipment both. At any rate, he was scheduled to take his leave of Jonathan Buffler as soon as this job was rounded up.

All the while I listened to them, my bound wrists continued to flash dots and dashes from the wall light of my room, reflecting off the perilously fingered mirror. The process was routine by this time—a hopeless routine at that—but it was something with which to work off some of the death-cell tenseness that gripped me.

Shortly after one o'clock—and I remember that the lights were still ablaze in the top floor of the Buffler Tower—my heliographic routine came to an end. I heard the houseman coming up to get me. Quickly I tossed the little mirror under the bed.

The houseman paused in the doorway. Buffler's voice sounded from below, muttering another telephone number. This time, for some reason, Buffler called the offices of Buffler Tower. Perhaps he thought the excitement of Gertrude Becker's death had caused some of the staff to remain at the Tower discussing the strange affair, and he would find Jewel there.

"Give me the office of Secretary Number Two . . ." His voice was tense. "Hello . . . Hello! Is Jewel— Who the devil is this? . . . *What?* . . . Oh, my God!"

The telephone crashed down and I could hear Buffler's hoarse breathing. I didn't know what to make of it.

The houseman, thoroughly impatient with his master's continual telephoning, went on about his business. He came into the room, and then he cursed.

"Fell out of bed, huh? What the hell you up to, Olin? Trying to escape?"

I looked him coolly in the eyes. My mouth was gagged, so I couldn't say anything, which was just as well.

He grunted sourly, picked me up in his arms, bonds, gag, bandages and all, and carried me down the two flights of stairs to the basement.

He placed me in a corner of the room on the floor. I could see the ray gun diagonally across from me, polished and gleaming under the dim light. It was a beautiful array of equipment for such an ugly purpose. But it murdered clean, without leaving a mark that any coroner or doctor would ever find. That was its beauty. I wondered what they would do with *my* body.

Slowly, weakly, Jonathan Buffler tottered down to the basement level. His blindfold was over his eyes again. He lifted it long enough to glance at me, then replaced it. I never saw his face so white.

"One more job," the houseman observed in his characteristically impersonal manner. "It won't take but a minute. I'll have these instruments disassembled and packed away before dawn, and our fears will be over . . . What's the matter, Buffler?"

"You won't disassemble it," said Buffler in a voice that was like dry ice. "I've changed the plan."

"What the hell! What's the matter, Buffler? You sick?"

"Do you think I'm sick?" Buffler cracked coldly. He raised his blindfold and moved toward the instruments.

"I never knew you to be sick *down here,*" said the houseman dubiously. "I thought your sickness was something that you got when things didn't go right. Did something in that telephone call upset you? Something about Jewel?"

BUFFLER snarled, "Maybe *I'm* going blind." He bit his words with an icy fury that was on the ragged edge of breaking. "Maybe *I* can't tell pink from green. Maybe *I* can't count windows straight. But by heaven, I can't do any worse than the experts I hire!"

"What the devil?" the houseman barked. "You're dizzy. You're sick as a horse. Get upstairs. I've got one more job here—"

"I've got one more job!" Buffler roared.

He snatched the color filters out of a slot and started the big barrel of the ray gun rotating on the turntable. He ripped a command at the houseman.

"Stand back, damn you! *I'm* doing this one, to make sure it won't miss."

The big barrel swung around in my general direction, and the spin of a wheel from Buffler's shaking white fingers brought the elevation down. The puzzled houseman backed away to the corner, as if to humor the old man to the last, but he studied Buffler's operations with the eye of a critical machinist.

Buffler continued to snarl enigmatically. "A little bonus on my pay sheet, for someone who didn't come through with the goods."

Then one of his white hands shot to the switch, and the other suddenly rotated the gun past me toward the next corner.

"Look out!" the houseman screamed.

"I'll do this one, you damned bonehead!" Buffler shrieked.

Then both the mad voices were drowned by the hum of motors and the thunder of purple sparks. The houseman's hands beat at the air in protest, but the invisible line of death turned full on him—

The houseman simply fell, lifeless.

"You're next!" Buffler's murderous bulbous eyes turned on me, and I could read the words of his snarling lips, submerged by the thunder of the machine.

Half blinded by the dazzle of sparks, I saw the gleaming barrel start to swing back. I closed my eyes, waited.

The waiting dragged out to full seconds. The sensation—whatever it would be—must be almost upon me. It would be quick, I thought. Perhaps there would be no sensation. Perhaps I wouldn't even know. Why didn't it come? Or *had* it happened? Or would I faint before it struck? I forced my eyes open.

I saw, against the wild array of purple sparks, that the barrel had stopped, pointing a few feet to one side of me. Buffler's nervous hands whirled a wheel, and the gun gradually nosed upward—toward the stairway!

For halfway down the stairs were four uniformed men, and back of them Dr. Ramsell.

I couldn't hear their guns. I could only see them blaze away at the humpty-dumpty figure at the death-ray controls. Jonathan Buffler's pear-shaped head was suddenly streaked with red. The black blindfold leaped from his forehead, fluttered above the delta of purple sparks—then *flash!*—and it was transformed to a puff of white smoke.

Buffler fell, his fat white hands clutching his blood-streaked jowls. His lips wrenched in agony. I could not hear his cry, but I could see it in his face.

The officers advanced down the stairs cautiously, making sure they were well in the clear from the death ray. Evidently they had arrived in time to see the houseman go down.

But before anyone reached Jonathan Buffler, he pushed himself up heavily on his elbows, and seemingly with superhuman effort crawled—crawled toward the path of the gun's invisible ray. With one last agonized burst of strength, he rose before the barrel. Then he fell, as the houseman had fallen, completely lifeless . . .

Almost as soon as the echoes of the motors had died away, my gag was removed, my bonds were slit, and the welcome sting of circulation shot through my wrists and ankles.

FOR the remaining hours of the night, the doctor stayed with me in my bedroom, dressing my wounds and giving me some of the psychological as well as physical care that my condition required. I hadn't realized until it was all over that I had been on the verge of hysteria.

Bit by bit, I told him my story.

When I had finished, the doctor said, "So there *was* a death's-head among the mirrors!"

"Yes," I conceded. "The only mirrors he really needed for his murder were the ones in Gertrude Becker's office. The rest were all a part of his ruse, so that the ones he needed wouldn't attract undue attention. But he saw to it that they were an individual color, so that his filtered light detector could direct the death ray to the right window."

"And he kept those mirrors swaying," the doctor observed, "so that the ray couldn't miss fire. Those swinging quartz mirrors must have reflected that ray through the whole sweep of the room."

I thought that over for a moment, shuddered. And then one of the most puzzling questions of all came back to my mind.

"But this houseman of Buffler's—he seemed a cross between an inventor and a cold-blooded executioner. Not brutal—just cold as ice. Wonder who the man was."

Dr. Ramsell stroked his chin. "Well, maybe we can check through the Patent Office in Washington. Just in case

somebody in the last few years invented a machine even generally similar to the one in the basement. Of course, he might have had a criminal record, and we could check on his fingerprints."

"You may have something there," I said. "He certainly was tough enough. But at any rate, we'll never know the big scheme they were planning. As far as I can judge, this whole thing boils down to this proposition:

"Somewhere in his career, Jonathan Buffler came across this fellow, and the two found they had a lot in common. They got to work on this death ray, which can be focused at either a near or far object, made certain plans for its use—and then Buffler botched up the whole works."

Dr. Ramsell nodded grimly. "Yes, he was better at that than anything else."

"But I'm still at sea on how he got his wires crossed," I said. "It was Becker he was after. She knew he killed his wife, and so held a gun at his head, so to speak. But it was Jewel he killed, eh?"

"Becker can thank Jewel's selfish scheming for that," said Dr. Ramsell, a slight smile back of his lively black eyes.

"Jewel returned from her recent visit with Buffler bearing the news that he had appointed her to be Secretary Number One. She forced Becker to move out at once, and little Jewel took over the Number One office, pink mirrors and all."*

The doctor picked up the pocket mirror that lay on the floor just under my bed.

"Is this your dot-and-dash instrument?"

"Yes. You caught my message?"

"I didn't, but a cruising police car did. The officers caught the reflected dots and dashes from the Tower and phoned me. I came right out. Rather clever of you, Olin," he grinned.

"I take after my great-uncle," I said with a wink. Then, more seriously, I asked,

"Dr. Ramsell, was Jonathan Buffler just a bungling murderer—or was he crazy?"

The doctor laughed lightly. "What do *you* think?"

*The science of light is quite a complex one, and there is much about the nature of light we do not know. However, it is well-known that light itself consists of many colors, differing in wave-length ranging from the infra-red (which is invisible) to the ultra-violet (also invisible). Thus, if anything is said to be of a certain color, such as the pink of the mirrors in the murder room, it is pink only because its composition is such that it *reflects* only the pink rays, of that particular wave-length, and *absorbs* the others.

It is this principle of light that Buffler employed in singling out his murder room in the tower, thus insuring that the death ray would be reflected *only* in the desired room, and not in *every* room of the tower. Since the death ray was pink, or could be set for any other color if desired, the room with the pink mirrors was the only one that *did not* absorb it and render it harmless.—Ed.

» PHOTOGRAPHING GHOSTS «

MANY people claim to have taken photographs of ghosts—which those of us who are more scientifically inclined in turn claim reflects on either their credibility or sanity. Now it's been proved definitely that such ghostly images ARE reflections—on the camera lens!

Yes, we're talking about the flaring rings of light which occasionally appear in photographs, sometimes seeming to resemble disembodied faces or—according to spiritualists—"ectoplasm" just materializing. Such ghosts have now been laid for all time—by a thin film of oil!

That's right, the same monomolecular films which a year ago were being used to make glass invisible by canceling out reflection. And now they've been put on camera lenses to prove that ghosts, rather than vanishing "when the cock crows and the first light appears", flee when science steps in and all reflections of light are eliminated.

There's a rumor current that Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where the "Ghost Busters" work, is being picketed by a line of wraith-like figures. M. I. T. is unwilling to confirm.

RIDDLES OF SCIENCE

What Makes the Wind Blow?

BUT STILL **MORE AMAZING** IS THE MYSTERY OF THE STEADY, FRIENDLY **TRADE WIND** WHICH IN THE DAYS OF SAILING VESSELS MEANT SO MUCH TO OCEAN TRAVEL.

NATURE'S MOST TERRIBLE AND FREAKISH WINDSTORM IS A **CYCLONE**. EXACTLY WHAT CAUSES THIS FUNNEL-SHAPED CONE OF WHIRLING AIR **SCIENCE DOESN'T KNOW.**

SCIENTISTS STUDY THE **WIND**, BECAUSE THE WHOLE SCIENCE OF **WEATHER PREDICTION** DEPENDS ON THE VAGARIES OF THE VAST OCEAN OF ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH WE LIVE.

JOE SEWELL

THE mystery of what makes the wind blow seems at first consideration to have a simple answer, but in reality it is quite complex, and science is continually studying the mystery of just why air currents act as they do. The sun's heat, of course, has much to do with lifting masses of warm air, thus pulling in cool air under it. But what causes such freaks as cyclones, tornadoes, the mysterious steady trade winds, is still unsolved.

In an instant the surface of the world-monster was a livid hell of action as death

The Monster OUT OF SPACE

by MALCOLM JAMESON

This was no planetoid wandering in the void. It was a living monster, threatening to eat whole worlds. Could Berol's science stop it?

"GRAB something, folks, and hang on. I'm putting this little packet down on her tail!"

Bob Tallen shoved home the warning-howler switch, pushed the intership phone transmitter away from him, and jabbed the ignition control for the reversing tube.

Before the blasts fired, he threw two turns of his sling around him and thrust himself easily against the braces. Sudden decelerations were all in the day's work for him. He lay there grinning at the dismayed cries wafted to him from the laboratory compartment just behind. He heard the crash of glass even above the vibration of the belching tube.

The trim little *Sprite* shuddered, then bucked. Slowly and tremblingly, she began her turn. It was not often the exquisite little yacht of Fava Dithrell experienced the rough and ready hand of a Space Guardsman at her throttle. Usually the ship took a more demure pace.

"Bob! What happened?"

Fava herself had laboriously clawed her way to the control room, pulling along by the grab-irons in the fore-and-aft passage. Walter Berol, panting and dripping rusty-colored slime, clung uncertainly behind her. Both looked startled, but Berol also looked sheepish.

"Breakers ahead," announced Tallen calmly. "Some bonehead of a lighthouse tender forgot to recharge the beacon, or it's been robbed, or a meteor hit it. Anyhow, I thought I'd heave to and have a look-see."

"B-but . . . why so suddenly?" complained Berol, looking ruefully at his reeking smock. "I-I . . . that is, we . . ."

"Sudden is my nature," answered Bob Tallen serenely, jutting his jaw a trifle. "The situation called for a stop. So I stopped. It's as simple as that."

"Oh," said Berol.

"Walter was showing me how to use the laboratory he rigged up for me," explained Fava with a little flush, "and we were looking at a culture of those *vermes horridans*--those nasty pests that overrun Dad's plantations on Titania. You spilled 'em all over him when you reared back like that!"

"Tough," commented Tallen, looking casually up at the pulsating red light

on the control board. It indicated a considerable celestial body not far ahead.

"I thought he could take care of himself. He's as big and husky as I am."

"Oh, I get it," Berol spoke up with a good-natured laugh. "The big bad caveman was up here all alone, and he thought it was time he got in an inning."

"Boys! Boys!" protested Fava. "Don't spoil our vacation. You sound like a pair of infants."

Walter Berol grinned.

Bob Tallen laughed too. "What the hell—nothing like a little emergency to pep up a party. Trot out the space suits, Fav, and we'll all take a stroll as soon as I can put this can alongside that rock, whatever it is."

Fava tapped her foot in annoyance, but there was a twinkle in her smoldering black eyes. She got a big kick out of the friendly rivalry of her two suitors. She liked them both immensely, even if they were as different as the poles.

Bob Tallen—Commander Tallen of the Space Guard—was bold, impetuous and able. He already had every decoration the Systemic Council could bestow. He would tackle a herd of Martian *felisaurs* barehanded if Fava were threatened, and never think twice while he was doing it. She liked him for his swift decisions and his daring.

WALTER BEROL—*Doctor* Berol to the world, director of the Biological Institute — was easily more clever, but cursed with an incurable shyness that had all but wrecked his career. Yet, given time, he could solve any problem. Moreover, he was considerate and possessed of a droll sense of humor that made him good company anywhere. He was solid gold, even if not spectacular.

Fava felt the ship lurch as Tallen cut out two more tubes. The visiplate was glowing now, and a strange object was coming into focus.

"I'm damned," muttered Tallen, looking from his "Asteroid List" to the visiplate and back again. "Listen to this." He read:

> The planetoid is known as Kellog's 218, and is a coffin-shaped iron body with some quartz inclusions. A Class R-41 buzzing beacon is installed, its period—

"Pear-shaped, I'd call it," said Fava. "It's a funny-looking thing, isn't it?"

"Looks like a rotten canteloupe impaled on an iron bar," remarked Berol.

"And at that end—where that pink, mushy-looking stuff is," exclaimed Fava, with growing excitement, "it seems to be covered with high grass!"

"Yes," said Berol, watching narrowly, "and it's undulating—as if in a breeze!"

"Nonsense," growled Bob Tallen, staring at the visi-screen. "How could there be wind on a boulder like that—and where did you ever see grass beyond Mars?"

It was a queer sight they saw in the visiplate—a writhing, doughy mass seemingly plastered on one end of Kellog's planetoid. And there was no beacon.

"Watch yourself!" called Tallen. "I'm landing."

* * *

WHEN Walter Berol and Fava were well up onto the first of the doughy terraces, they were astonished at how differently it appeared than as they had seen it from the ship. What they thought was mushy substance turned out to be a firm but yielding covering, much like dressed leather.

The waving grasses on closer examination appeared to be clusters of bare

stalks of the same dirty pink material, standing like wild bamboo. Yet their eyes had not deceived them. The grasses *did* move, gently undulating as do the fronds of huge marine growths in terrestrial oceans.

"What do you suppose *those* things are?" Fava suddenly asked, looking down after the two had advanced a bit between two avenues of the strange clumps. At the girl's feet, scattered in the pathway, were little crimson knobs, like half-buried tomatoes.

"They look squishy," Fava said, and kicked one with her toe.

Her shrill scream followed so instantly that Berol was dazed. The nearest of the clusters came to life with startling speed. A snaky antenna dived downward like the curving neck of a swan and threw its coils around Fava. Paralyzed by the swiftness and unexpectedness of the attack, Berol stared dumbly as the groping tip took two more turns and was creeping onward to enwrap the girl's leg.

Berol fumbled at his belt for his hand-ax, and yelled hoarsely into his helmet microphone for Bob Tallen. Tallen could not be far away.

Before Berol could free his ax, he heard Fava's strangling gasp. The crushing pressure of the tentacle had choked off her breath. Horrified, he saw her being lifted upward; glimpsed a yawning, purple slit opening up a few feet beyond.

Berol's blood ran cold, but he attacked the clutching tentacle with all the fury he could muster. The first blow rebounded with such violence as to almost hurl the hatchet from his hand, but he struck and struck again. He saw little nicks appear, and a dark, viscous fluid ooze out, splattering. Half blinded by tears of helpless rage and sweat, he kept on hacking.

Then he knew he could not raise his arm, and he felt the lash of some heavy thing across his shoulders. His faceplate was fogged and he could not see, but he felt the hideous nuzzling beneath his armpit and then the cold, rib-cracking constriction as another of the frightful antennae seized him. He had only time to cry out once more:

"Help, Bob—Fava—Bob . . ."

Then he fainted.

"HE'S coming round."

It was Bob Tallen, speaking as through a bloody mist. Berol knew, from the sweet abundance of the air, that he must be out of his suit. He must be on the ship, then. He stirred and opened his eyes, saw Fava hanging over him, looking at him anxiously. Then he remembered—those entwining, crushing, cruel tentacles; and the vile, sticky blood of the beast—gaping, waiting, slimy and nauseating. Berol shuddered. But Fava was safe!

"It's okay, old man," he heard Tallen's reassuring voice. "You've been pretty sick, but it's all over now. We're hitting the gravel at Lunar Base in an hour, and there's an ambulance waiting. In a couple of weeks you'll be good as new."

"That . . . thing . . . was . . . organic," Berol managed. "Did . . . you . . ."

"Forget it," said Tallen. "The sky is full of weird monsters. I burned that one down with my flame gun, and that's that. I daresay that rock was swarming with 'em, but never mind. It's two hundred million miles away now."

Berol tried to forget it, but he could not. He could not forget that he had been at Fava's side when she was imperiled, and that he had failed. It was Tallen who blasted the monster down —whether it was animal or vegetable or some hideous hybrid.

So he was thinking as he tossed and

fretted in his room in the great hospital in Lunar Base, knowing that Bob Tallen was making hay while the sun shone. Tallen was still at the base, fitting out the new cruiser *Sirius* which he was to command. He had all his evenings free, however, and these he spent in company with Fava. . . .

"You are a dear, sweet boy and I'm fond of you," Fava told Walter Berol, as she walked out with him the day he was discharged. They were on the way to the launching racks to see Bob Tallen take off for his shakedown voyage. "But the man I marry must be resourceful, masterful. I'm sorry . . . I don't want to hurt you . . . but . . ."

"It's to be Bob, then?"

She nodded, and suddenly the universe seemed very empty. Then a feeling of unworthiness almost overwhelmed him. Yes, she was right. He lacked the red-blooded qualities she admired in Bob Tallen. He was not fit mate for her.

But as suddenly another emotion surged through him. It was the old primeval urge—old as the race itself—of a man balked of his woman. He meant to have her, Tallen or no Tallen.

"You will not marry Bob," said Walter Berol quietly.

CHAPTER II

The Heavenly Monster

FAVA'S voice had been urgent, frightened.

"Come over to Headquarters at once! I am so afraid—for Bob."

Walter Berol stood only for a moment on the landing deck atop his great laboratory before stepping into the gyrocopter, but in that moment he cast an uneasy glance at the serene star-spangled canopy overhead. Disquieting thoughts were running through his mind.

In the three weeks since Bob Tallen and the *Sirius* had departed, many disturbing reports had come in from the asteroid belt. Eleven sizable planetoids were missing from their orbits—vanished! A dozen assorted cargo ships were overdue and unreported. A lighthouse tender had sent a frantic S.O.S. through a fog of ear-splitting static, and had been choked off in the middle of it with the words, "We are being engulfed . . ."

The gunboat *Jaguar,* sent to aid the tender, had not been heard of since. It was all very inexplicable. It was ominous.

Berol strode past the grim-faced sentries outside the General Staff Suite. As Director of the Biological Institute, he could enter those carefully guarded precincts. Inside, the room was jammed with officers, listening intently and gazing at the huge visi-screen. Fava sat beside an Admiral Madigan, fists white as snow as she clutched the arm of the chair. Berol stopped where he stood. A deep bass voice was coming in through the Mark IX televox.

"That's Bill Evans, in the *Capella,*" whispered someone.

". . . we've finally caught up with the thing, whatever it is, and are close aboard now. We have circumnavigated it twice, but there is not the slightest trace of the *Jaguar* or any other ship."

Walter Berol was staring at an incredible landscape slipping beneath the *Capella's* scanner. It was a dirty pink, and studded with many curious knobs of writhing tubular matter. It looked soft and mushy, very much like a rotten pumpkin. It strangely resembled the bulbous end of Kellog's 218. Berol shuddered at the memory. Evans went on, ". . . the waving clumps mentioned by the *Jaguar* just before her radio went dead are not visible. All I can see is mounds of what looks like Gar-

gantuan macaroni lying in heaps. The skipper is about to land. In a minute or so I'll give you a close-up. Stand by!"

There was a raucous blare of unusually heavy static, and when the voice did begin again, it was hard to make out the words. The static distorted the visuals, too, so that the screen was a blur of crawling pink light and no more. Presently the operators managed to eliminate the worst of the noise, and the voice came through once more, bellowing out against the deafening barrage of sound.

". . . surface very deceptive . . . quite hard and tough. A landing party has gone out through the lock and is cutting samples of the surface with drills and axes. One man is chopping at a huge crimson growth as big as a barrel. Hold on—one of those hillocks of collapsed tubing is moving! The things are whipping around like snakes! Some of them have shot straight up into the air, and others are curling all around us!"

Berol edged his way through the crowd. Fava was breathing hard. Admiral Madigan's jaw was granite and his eyes never wavered from the screen.

". . . they are tentacles! One has wrapped itself around our bow, and another group has caught us amidships. That is why we roll and pitch this way. The captain is clearing away the Q-guns. In a minute we will blast out—you'd better cut down on your power until that is over. There he goes . . ."

A dull roar filled the room and the walls trembled. Then the volume dropped. Brilliant scarlet light slashed and stabbed across the visiplate, and then it went almost black as if obscured by thick, oily smoke.

". . . all stern tubes in full discharge. The surface of the planetoid—if this damn thing *is* a planetoid—is smoking furiously. Several clusters of the antennae astern of us have been burned away. We're still hung here, though. Looks like the impulse of the tubes is not enough to tear us loose from that grip forward . . ."

A wail of unearthly static drowned out the laboring voice. Then,

". . . trying the bow-tubes now. Wait. No, they can't get out that way . . . the spacelock is submerged and we're twisting over fast! A huge crevasse has opened up under us. We're sinking into it! The whole port is covered. We—*a-a-awrk!*"

The voice ceased, choked off, and the light on the screen went out abruptly. In the dark room no one spoke for an instant. Berol felt, rather than saw, the tension among the hardened Space Guard officers. Fava's hand crept into his and clung to it.

The *Capella* had just gone to the doom they had so nearly missed, for there was no mistaking the similarity between this monster of unguessable nature and the menace on Kellog's 218.

"RAISE *Sirius!*" broke in Admiral Madigan's voice, crisp and angry. "What the hell is Tallen doing all this time?"

But the *Sirius* was there, hovering over the spot where the *Capella* had been, her shattering Q-rays lashing down, searing acres of the ravenous false asteroid. She turned on her televox so that those at Headquarters could see the quivering, sizzling terrain below. Clumps of the three hundred foot antennae were being roasted to a sooty ash, and swelling and popping with evil gases as they did. Bob Tallen's voice came through, strong and clear, barking out strident orders.

Nothing the *Sirius* could do, however, could save her floundering sister. The upper turret of the *Capella* sank out of

sight, and the scorched, leathery integument closed over it. In a few minutes there was only a livid, ashen scar, and even that mark faded.

Commander Bob Tallen's face came onto the screen, huge in its close-up.

"Heat does it," he said tersely. "Send me all you've got, and H. E.—feroxite by the ton. I'll blast the damn thing to shreds, and then burn the shreds."

As the face faded, Admiral Madigan sprang into action.

"Out of here, all of you! Squadrons Three, Six and Ten take off at once. Report to Tallen when you get there. All reserve flotillas will install heavy-duty flame projectors and take on fuel to capacity. Report to me the instant you are ready."

He jerked out other curt orders and the officers hastened from the room. Fava had withdrawn to one side, looking on with eyes wide with horror. How well she knew the grip of those merciless tentacles! For there could be no mistaking that the monstrosity she had just been watching was the same as that on Kellog's 218, grown larger. And she sickened at the memory of the slimy fissures the vile beast seemed to open at will. It filled her with dread, for Bob Tallen was going to attack the thing, and he was rash, so reckless in his daring.

"Oh, Walter!" she cried, clutching Berol by the arm. "Do you think . . ."

Walter Berol shook his head gloomily.

"It is too late for brute force. The thing is too big. We should have found out something about its nature and destroyed it when it was little. But it must be four miles in diameter now, and growing as it feeds. All our fleet can have no more effect than a swarm of gnats nibbling at a rhinoceros. If it is to be attacked at all, it must be through its biological processes. Bob is attempting the impossible."

Admiral Madigan wheeled, a smile of cold scorn curling on his lip.

"So! The dreamer leans from his ivory tower to look us over and tell us we're wrong. Well! And what is the solution the great brain has to offer? Quickly! This is an emergency—men have died before our eyes!"

"I—don't—know," said Dr. Berol slowly. "It will take time, research. I will begin at once. . . ."

"Bah!" snorted Madigan. "Research! It is lucky that there are men of action at hand. Like our Tallen."

He turned away abruptly, leaving Walter Berol standing where he was, his face aflame. Dull anger rose in his breast, but there was pity mingled with it—pity for the blind arrogance of these self-styled men of action, who thought they could control this colossal menace with their puny weapons.

For of all the men in that room, only Berol realized to the full the immensity of the threat that hung over the Solar System. If the monster had drifted in as a spore from the beyond, consumed cosmic gravel until it was big enough to digest a body like Kellog's iron planetoid, where would it stop? After the asteroids, what would it devour? The planetary moons, perhaps. And after those?

In that instant Walter Berol resolved to stop this Mooneater—and knew that he would face ridicule and obstruction. But the pink menace was more than a threat to the race—it had become a personal symbol. The creature, whatever its nature, had attacked the woman he loved, then crushed and humiliated him in her presence. Now it had brought the taunt of this space admiral.

"Fava," he said abruptly, "I want the use of the *Sprite*."

"And if I refuse it?"

"Then I shall commandeer it in the

name of the Institute."

THE air of quiet finality in his tone startled her. He had used it once before—the day he said she would not marry Bob Tallen. She looked at him wonderingly, then shrugged prettily. Let him try; he meant well. But she was sure he would fail. Out in the cold, gravityless vacuum of space he would fail as he always had outside his laboratories. That did not matter. What did matter to her just then, was that she saw a pretext to be near her sweetheart.

"Very well, Walter," Fava agreed, smiling. "But remember, I am rated as a laboratory helper—and the *Sprite* is my yacht. I intend going, too."

"But the danger . . ."

"Bob is in danger too," she said simply.

* * *

"DEAD," murmured Walter Berol. On the table in the *Sprite's* flying laboratory lay a clumsy Venusian rock-chewer—the *Lithovere Veneris* — a queer, quartz-eating variety of armadillo. Seen through the fluoroscope, all its internal organs were still.

"A twentieth of a grain of *toxicin** has no effect—a tenth kills it."

"So you think—" Fava was looking on.

"No. It is merely worth trying. The Mooneater's internal chemistry may be the same; it may not. We have twelve drums of the stuff on board. I want to plant it on the monster's next victim. Then we will watch for the effect."

The next victim was the small planetoidal body Athor. Men had learned something of the predatory habits of the pink invader. This tremendous monstrosity swerved from orbit to orbit by the manipulation of magnetic fields, which it set up with a howling of static. Inexorably it pursued the cosmic body until it overtook it. Then, without any crash of collision, the marauder would split open along its leading face and take the planetoid bodily into itself. The maw would snap shut and the Mooneater would move on, bigger and more ravenous, to its next prey.

Fava set the *Sprite* down in the dismal Athor canyon known as South Valley. There was barely time for what they had to do, as the Mooneater was already a huge and growing disk in the black sky. They could even make out the lightning playing over its surface where Tallen's cruisers hung in a cloud, ever blasting, burning and harassing. Time after time they had scarified its surface, until there were only black stumps where the antennae clumps had been, but as often the monster grew fresh ones.

Walter Berol put on a space suit and with four of his crew sought a cave in which to cache their deadly drug toxicin. But hardly had they emerged from the lock when, with a fiery swoop, a huge warship settled to the ground nearby. A dozen helmeted figures sprang from its airlock and bounded toward the grounded yacht.

"What are you fools doing here? This asteroid was ordered evacuated thirty hours ago!"

The voice was Bob Tallen's, harsh and angry.

Then in astonishment Tallen recognized the familiar lines of the *Sprite*, and knew the man before him was Berol.

"My God!" shouted Tallen hoarsely. "Fava here? Get out—at once—while you can!"

He pointed to the oncoming Mooneater, which now filled a quarter of the

* *Toxicin*, a powerful chemical substance which is capable of breaking down and dissolving the proteins of certain living creatures, such as the rock-chewer of Venus, described here as an armadillo-like creature.—Ed.

sky.

"I see it," replied Walter Berol. "We will leave as soon as we dump some drums of chemicals. I am planting a dose of poison . . ."

"Arrest this man!" Bob Tallen whirled on the bluejackets who had followed him.

The sailors from the *Sirius* pounced on Berol and bore him protesting and struggling into the *Sprite,* Tallen following close behind. Inside the yacht Tallen snapped orders to the other ship. The airlocks of both vessels rang shut, and on the instant they plunged upward with streaking wakes of flame.

"Look," said Bob Tallen dramatically, pointing back at the asteroid.

The Mooneater was no more than four diameters away. It had opened its maw, revealing a slimy, purplish cavern. Five minutes later the ghastly pseudo-lips were closing in on the periphery of little Athor. Then there was but a livid line to mark where the asteroid had gone. The pink monster rolled on, heedless of the massed cruisers stabbing at it with their Q-rays and heat guns.

EVERYONE gasped a little. "If it had not been for me," Tallen went on, his face a thundercloud, "you—and Fava—would be inside there. I have placed you under restraint to save you from your own idiocy. This is a man's game. It is no time to play around with theories. Action is what is required now."

"You've been in action for two months," retorted Walter Berol with pointed irony. "The Mooneater, I believe, has approximately trebled its volume in that time. If that is how effective action is, I think it is high time somebody did a little *thinking.*"

"That's my worry," snapped Tallen. "The Autarch, head of the Systemic Council, has given *me* this job. When I want help I'll ask for it. Until then, you are to keep out of my way."

CHAPTER III

Pursuit

FROM Mars the destruction of Deimos was plainly seen. Every eye, every telescope, every pair of binoculars was trained on the oncoming scourge. Batteries of cameras drank in every detail through telephoto lenses. Photographic plates were made from ultra-violet and infra-red rays. At every vantage point the Omnivox announcers set up their mikes and described the battle to the thoroughly aroused citizenry of the Solar System.

Bob Tallen, now a Space Guard commodore, had set up his controls in the south tower of the administration building in Ares City. He was ready for the final test of strength between his forces and the hitherto irresistible pink menace. Under his direction Deimos was honeycombed with galleries and tunnels—miles of mines packed with tens of thousands of tons of feroxite. Around Mars' equator, heavy siege guns had been placed to assist the ships in their bombardment. In one tremendous concentration of flame and violent detonation Tallen proposed to blast the marauder to bits.

The *Sprite* was safely tucked away in Martian Skyyard, and to permit Fava and Walter Berol to witness his triumph, Tallen had made room by his side for both of them.

Fourteen cruisers of the first class, and many dozen lesser ones, had trailed the Mooneater from the asteriod zone, hammering incessantly at it as they followed. Day after day they had pumped high explosives into it and played fierce flames upon its ever-sprouting tentacles.

Hundreds of cargo ships shuttled between the fleet and the bases, bringing fresh supplies of fuel and ammunition. As a demonstration of the sustained application of brute force in massive doses, Tallen's campaign had no precedent. Now he was ready for the kill.

"It won't work, Bob," said Berol mildly, as he watched the huge pink orb advancing on Mars' tiny moon. "The thing is organic, I tell you."

"So what?" barked Tallen. "If it lives, it can be killed, can't it?"

"*If* you can apply enough force at one time. That is what you cannot do. You are trying to kill an elephant by jabbing it with a penknife. Being organic, the creature is capable of self-repair. That is where you're licked. You've got to upset its organic functioning . . ."

"*I'll* upset its functioning," said Bob Tallen grimly, his eye on the monster. It was within one diameter of Deimos. He jabbed the button before him—three times. The attack was on.

A cloud of cruisers darted between the yawning mouth of the Mooneater, letting their salvos go into its open chasm. Others smothered its rear areas with raging flame. And as the Mooneater advanced relentlessly in spite of all, until its hideous pseudo-lips closed on the little satellite, Bob Tallen pressed the key that set off the radio-controlled mines.

"Ooooh! Look!" screamed Fava, gripping Berol's arm. "Bob has won! He has torn it to shreds!"

For a few minutes it appeared he had. An immense blister rose as one side of the Mooneater swelled to accommodate the terrific blast of the expanding feroxite gases within. Then the monstrosity burst shatteringly in scores of places, as in a chain of terrestrial volcanoes, tearing great strips of the beast's entrails. Gaping streamers and shreds of purplish flesh were flung out into the void, rent by the explosion. Other strings of viscid stuff drooled from the jagged slot that had been a mouth, only to flash into flame as the ray-guns lashed at them.

Then the throaty roar of thousands of heavy guns from Mars drowned out all other sound. The moment the space ships were clear, the artillery opened up, slamming salvo after salvo into the harried monster. Huge hunks of the leatherlike hide were torn out, leaving ragged craters. Tentacles were blown to flying fragments and ripped away by their roots. With an outpouring of static that exceeded any before, the monster turned away from Mars and headed back toward the asteroids.

BOB TALLEN glared incredulously after the retreating raider. He had hurt it—yes. But it was still *intact!* It had not disgorged the satellite it had just devoured. It was on its way back to complete the clean-up of the asteroids. Cruiser after cruiser fell away from it and headed back to Mars. They were out of ammunition. The great stroke had been made—and had failed!

"With your permission, Commodore Tallen," remarked Walter Berol dryly, "I will take up my researches where I left off. I notice that your high explosive shells have a penetration of something like three hundred feet. When you consider that the Mooneater is upwards of ten miles in diameter, it ought to be clear that you are doing little more than irritating its hide. It must be attacked from within, not externally."

"Research and be damned to you!" Bob Tallen flung at him, reckless in his anger and disappointment. "You keep yelping about what science can do—well, show us! Only keep out of my way."

"I will do that," replied Berol coldly. He rose and left the room, and he did not glance at Fava as he left. He realized the challenge had been given and accepted. His first job was the conquest of the Mooneater. His personal affairs could wait. After all, if the Mooneater was to be permitted to glut itself without stint on the planet bodies of the Solar System, the time was not far off when personal affairs would cease to exist. From that moment Walter Berol dedicated himself to the destruction of the pink monster.

* * *

BEROL did not go near the *Sprite*. Instead he took the space tender *Jennie* from the Martian branch of the Biological Institute and went up and into the orbit of defunct Deimos. Floating there in tumultuous disorder were the gouts of viscous matter ejected from the wounded Mooneater, intermingled with long streamers of jagged and torn tissue. Berol gathered tons of the stinking, filthy stuff and carried it down to the branch laboratory on Mars.

For many weeks he immersed himself in the examination of his specimens. He and his aides sectioned, cultured and analyzed. He was amazed at what he found. The monstrosity was built of proteins!* By some freak of internal chemistry, the creature could actually transmute the heavier elements to lighter ones: convert iron to flesh, and quartz to organic fluids.

Yet despite his discovery of the macrocosmic nature of the monster's structure—it had individual cells as big as apples—he could learn little of its constitution as a whole, and nothing of its vital organisms. What he had was bits of the epidermis, or the droolings from its surface fluids. His task was as hopeless as that of reconstructing a whale from a few square inches of torn blubber.

Berol was still doggedly working at his quest when an "All-System" broadcast broke the stillness of his study. When the Autarch spoke, everyone listened.

"The peoples of the Solar System are advised that the Supreme Council has decreed that the wasteful war on the invader popularly known as the Mooneater shall cease. In spite of the gallant efforts of the Space Guard, it has destroyed all our asteroids, including Ceres and the moons of Mars. It is now close to a thousand miles in diameter and quite beyond our power to control . . ."

Dr. Berol gasped. He had lost touch with the outside world and did not know that things had come to such a pass.

"It is ordered, therefore, that all the satellites of the System of less than the destroyed planet bodies be evacuated immediately, and that scientists of every category abandon whatever research they may be engaged in at present, and concentrate on the problem of rendering Jupiter habitable. Our mathematicians have extended the curve of the Mooneater's consumption, knowing the size of the planetoidal bodies remaining, and have computed with great accuracy the date of extinction of each of our planets. Only Jupiter is so huge that the Mooneater can never grow large enough to swallow it.

"The Autarch has spoken!"

WALTER BEROL sat staring at the dead amplifier long after that final click. So Bob Tallen was beaten. The Autarch was beaten. The human race was beaten. It meant extinction, for it was unlikely that great king of

* Protein; an albuminous compound derived from a proteid, one of a class of important compounds found in nearly all animal and vegetable organisms, and containing carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, and sulphur.—Ed.

planets could ever be made habitable for man. And if it should, there was not enough transportation in the System to convey the populations there. . . .

Berol, too, was beaten. He realized that. All the feverish work of recent weeks was wasted. He had reached no conclusions, he had not found the fatal toxin that would kill the monster. Nor had he any clear notion of how to introduce it if he had it. It is true a cobra can kill a bull by the prick of a fang. But Berol had no proven poison, nor the means of injection. And now came the order to drop all work. His failure was complete, for the Autarch's dictum was final.

Wearily he pressed a button on his desk.

"Close our files on the Mooneater," he told his laboratory chief. "Let me have the index on the 'Flora and Fauna of Jupiter'."

* * *

FAVA DITHRELL burst excitedly into Walter Berol's study.

"Walter," she cried, "the Mooneater is here! It is passing Europa now!"

"There is nothing we can do about it," said Berol. "We have orders to disregard it. Anyhow, Callisto is safe for the present."

When Berol had moved his headquarters to be close to Jupiter, he was not greatly surprised to find that Fava was already there as a helper. The order of the Autarch had been for engineers of every degree and all scientists to work on the Jupiter project, and Fava was known as an amateur biologist. Berol had long suspected that she applied for a position in the Callistan laboratories because Bob Tallen was based on nearby Io. Since he had been pulled off the Mooneater hunt, Tallen had been put in charge of the evacuation of Jupiter's minor satellites.

"The Mooneater," Fava was repeating. "It's behaving queerly, Walter. It passed the small outer satellites without touching one of them."

"Hm-m," he mused. "That *is* odd. It may be significant." He drummed the desk with his fingers. "Perhaps it has reached its full growth; it may consume less hereafter."

The behavior of the Mooneater was odd, indeed. It skirted Jupiter's moons on a lazy, incurving spiral, and then departed from the Jovian* System without molesting even its smallest satellite! Speculation was rife. Had the monster attained its optimum—its maximum size? That could be it: each race of creatures has a limiting size. Only time could answer.

But as the panic subsided among the Jovian colonists, screaming accounts of the exodus from the Saturnian System began filling the news. The pink monstrosity was heading that way, and all of Saturn's moons, with one exception, were of edible size.

On rolled the Mooneater. It slid past Phoebe, past Hyperion and Rhea and all the other little moons. It touched none of them, but went on in close to the great semi-liquid planet. There, astoundingly enough, it swam into the midst of the Ring and stayed, floating for weeks about Saturn as a self-elected satellite! Then, as unaccountably as it had come, it left, and spiraled outward to intercept Uranus.

Walter Berol learned of it only because Fava told him. Her father's ranches were located on Titania, and she feared the properties were doomed. Berol shook his head gloomily. There was nothing he could do. The Autarch had repeatedly refused to permit him to resume his efforts. The head of the Council had gone so far as to threaten

*Jove and Jupiter are interchangeable mythological terms. Jovian is the adjective.—Ed.

stern disciplinary measures if the matter was brought up again.

But Fava's account of the Mooneater's actions in the vicinity of Saturn had a galvanic effect on Walter Berol. He jumped up excitedly.

"Yes, yes—of course! I might have anticipated it. The answer lies there, surely. She would have gone into the Rings for no other purpose—"

"*She!*" snapped Fava, her fears scurrying before her sense of outrage. "Why confer *my* sex on that unspeakable monster?" She stamped her tiny foot angrily.

"Yes—she!" Berol fairly shouted. "Don't you understand? We have to deal now with more of the accursed things—thousands, millions of them, perhaps. We must go there at once and stamp out her hellish progeny!"

FAVA was staring at him dumfounded. Such a display of excitement was very rare with Walter Berol. He talked on, vehemently.

"This monster was small once—how small we never knew. In the beginning it probably consumed cosmic sand and gravel, then boulders, then moons. Now it is mature, and like all other living things, it is under the compulsion to reproduce. She has laid her eggs in the Ring gravel!"

Fava's tension broke with a merry tinkling laugh. "Walter, have you gone crazy? Eggs! How fantastic!"

"Not at all. There can be no other conclusion. We see the cycle of the monster's life beginning all over again —with sand and gravel, and small diameter bodies near at hand. Like the bee, the ant and the beetle, she deposits her eggs where food suitable for the newborn is the most abundant. Why else would she abstain from eating those satellites herself? We know her appetite. Hers is the mother instinct!"

Fava gasped. It was a bold idea, but plausible. The Mooneater was a living creature, no one doubted that.

"But will the Autarch—" she began.

"To hell with the Autarch and his one-track mind!" Berol yelled, snatching up his head covering. "Your yacht, Fava—it is completely equipped. We'll defy them all. The existence of the race depends on us. In those baby Mooneaters is the clue to their structure, their chemistry. Come!"

CHAPTER IV

The Fatal Depths

"WE ARE practically at Ring speed now," said Anglin, Fava's sailing master.

All about them hung the glittering quartz and crystalline iron nuggets that swing forever about Saturn in broad bands.

"Good," said Walter Berol. "Turn on the ultra-violet beam."

He slipped on a space suit and went out onto the hull. For a long time he sat, holding a long rod that had a butterfly net at its end, studying the reflected rays sent back by the Ring particles. All about them seemed to be a sort of fog, so filled was the space with suspended dust and sand. Few of the little stones that compose the Ring are larger than marbles. It was a perfect feeding ground for embryo Mooneaters.

It was more than an hour before Berol caught the first embryo, but once he learned the peculiar lemon-yellow light with which they fluoresced, he began hauling them in by the dozens. They were not unlike basketballs—leathery, pinkish orange spheres covered with downlike fuzz. Those tiny hairs were what in time would come to be the horrid tentacles that held smaller prey—until one of the myriads of slit-

like mouths could open beneath.

Walter Berol turned the job of catching the creatures over to a pair of deckhands, and then hurried below with his first specimens. Triumphantly he slammed them down onto the dissecting table before Fava.

Swiftly, and under her watchful gaze, he slit one of the creatures open, cutting it from pole to pole with a green scalpel. He laid bare the hooplike formation of ribs ranged after the fashion of earthly meridians. His knife revealed the heavy circumpolar muscles that pulled the ribs to one side when in the act of eating huge masses. And under the viscid, purplish jelly that filled the body cavity, Berol found the palpitating green organ that must be the brain.

As rapidly as his fingers could fly, Berol traced the outflung intricacies of the branching green nerve-trunks, even to where they terminated at the skin in the tiny red specks that picked up the motor impulses.[1] Berol found the arterial tubes that conveyed the purple life-juices from the central reservoir, and he located the many subsidiary stomachs that lay under the fissured openings. Within an hour he had a clear understanding of the monster's anatomy.

"Bring me a needle of *toxicin,*" he ordered.

Fava injected the poison in one of the living specimens, but it had no effect. Then she tried heteraine, and totronol.[2] The totronol was also harmless, but the heteraine had a definite narcotic effect. It caused a temporary paralysis of the parts where it was injected.

"That's something," muttered Berol, after they had exhausted the list of drugs and poisons. "Now for disease germs."

Ranged about the compartment were phials and phials of bacilli. There were samples of the bacteria that caused every disease of man, beast, plant or known monster of the airless, dark planets. There were *skuldrums*—fat, sluglike lumps of fatty stuff that was the fatal enemy of the Plutonian lizard-cats. There were the thready spirochetes that plagued the Venusian rock-chewers, driving them to madness. There were others—globular, tubular, disk-shaped, some winged, some ciliated, some with fins. Each was sure death to some other living thing.

"Here," Berol said to Fava, handing her a tray full of ripped-out nerve ganglia and greenish brain fibre. "Find out whether any of these bacteria thrive in this stuff. I'll tackle the blood angle. Hurry!"

Fava blinked in mock dismay. Walter Berol had never spoken to her in such a brusque and authoritative manner. But she did not dislike it. She took the tray and went.

In ten hours they found the parasite they sought. It was a thin, pale worm —the *illi ulli,* parasite worm of the Venus fish life! Once it was introduced into the green nerve stuff, it multiplied at a terrific rate and quickly consumed it all.

"Now for the grand test," said Berol, as he leaned over a baby Mooneater with a hypodermic filled with a liquid that was crawling with the *illi ulli.* A quick jab, and the thing was done. Within an hour the leathery ball was a flabby corpse, its nervous system gutted

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[1] It was Fava's kicking at one of those red nerve-ends that had caused the tentacle to grasp her.—Ed.

[2] *Heteraine* is a narcotic drug, extremely poisonous to humans in anything but infinitesimal doses, although it is a distillate of the paralysis-spray of the Venusian giant boa. *Totronol* is an Earth drug which totally destroys the motor nerves of the spinal column, inducing a permanent and quickly fatal paralysis.—Ed.

by the ravenous worms. As it died, its multitude of slitlike mouths gaped open, gasping like the gills of an air-strangled water fish.

"Eureka!" whooped Dr. Berol, leaping into the air.

THE *Sprite* lurched forward, her jets screaming under forced discharge. Berol slewed the periscope about and took a look astern. Thousands of the leathery balls that might have grown into Mooneaters were springing into fiery incandescence, then exploding with silent *plops!* as the full energy of the backlashing rocket stream struck them. Berol knew there must be many thousands more of them, but someone else would have to sweep them up. He had bigger and more urgent game ahead. But first he must go into Iapetus for some needed supplies.

"Fava, while I am getting my rigging on board, your job is to make the *illi ulli* grow. I want 'em big—as big as possible—as big as anacondas, if you can do it. Force mutations on them with the X-ray, and feed them the synthetic diet I prescribed. Cull out the larger ones and let 'em propagate, and so on."

He snatched up a set of headphones and got through to the Governor of Iapetus. He lied glibly in a manner that simply amazed Fava. For Walter Berol issued a multitude of crisp orders —and said they were in the name of the Autarch and the Systemic Council! And he was probably already down on the punishment list for having vacated his post on Callisto without permission!

"I want," Berol snapped, "two large-capacity cargo ships loaded and ready to hop off tomorrow night. Here is the list of what is to be on board them."

It was an odd list: a two hundred foot derrick, a Myritz-Jorkin drill rig, complete with drill-bits and spare cutting heads; a hundred thousand feet of steel cable on spools; a three-inch detonon gun, with a thousand rounds of H.E. ammunition, but the shells to be unloaded except for delicate fuses; and twenty drums of 80% heteraine solution. With that equipment he wanted a drill crew of huskies and roughnecks from the gas fields of Io.

"That is all," barked Berol, as the acknowledgment came back. He yanked the jack from its socket and turned, to find Fava still by him.

"Well?" he said tartly. "Why aren't you nursing those worms along? Time flies!"

"I wanted to tell you, Walter, that I think you are wonderful." For the first time in many months Fava dropped the bantering tone she usually used toward him. "I had no idea you could be so—masterful! I didn't know . . . well, that you could *do* things . . . I-I . . ."

His impatient frown melted. Then he laughed uproariously for the first time since his encounter with the Mooneater on Kellog's 218.

"Oh, I see. Even you fell for the popular superstition that scientists have to be drier - than - dust, impractical boobs."

"B-but," she stammered, "you were always so clumsy . . . so timid . . . outside the laboratory . . ."

"You saw me trying to do things I didn't know how to do. That is all. But I am back in the laboratory—the whole Solar System is my laboratory now. I'm doing the work I know best. The difference is in the scale of it. I am on my way to inject an animal with disease germs. Since its hide is five or six *miles* thick, it calls for a gigantic needle." He laughed a little grimly.

"SURE!" said old Harvey Linholm, the gigantic six-foot-ten master

rigger who had been supplied with the drilling gear. "We see the whole damn idea. Me and my men will go to hell and back with you, Doc, if it comes to that. We've lost plenty to that moon-gobbling, howling menace, and we're fed up with it. Besides, I'd as soon die right now takin' a crack at the thing as wait and go to Jupiter. I can't see livin' on giant Jupiter—think of what I would weigh there!"

Berol grinned. He turned to the captains of the two supply ships.

"All right, then. Take off at once and proceed to the spot I gave you the geodetics of. I'll overtake you. After that, follow me down."

He hurried away and mounted the ramp up the side of the *Sprite's* launching cradle. An obviously agitated Fava overtook him as he was about to enter the ship.

"We've lost," she moaned. "The *gendarmes* are on the way to seize you. The Autarch has learned of your assumption of authority here and has ordered you brought to the Earth in irons for trial."

"They'll have to hurry," said Walter Berol grimly, swinging the door open. "I'm taking off in ten seconds, Autarch or no Autarch."

"That's not all," Fava said in a low voice. "Bob Tallen has found out where I am and is on his way here to get me. I had a message from him forbidding me to have anything more to do with you."

"Ah," said Berol. "Perhaps Bob could tell us how the Autarch happens to know so much about our expedition."

"Yes," she nodded, and it was almost a whisper.

Berol's face hardened. "I am shoving off—now! You may come or not. Please yourself."

"Let's hurry then," Fava said, closing the lock door behind her. "The police and Bob won't be far behind."

* * *

THE Mooneater was as huge as Luna. Led by the *Sprite,* the little flotilla circled in, warily, surveying the forest of clutching tentacle tips, now reaching thousands of feet into the sky. Lower and lower they flew, until at times they were diving between rows of the clumps.

"Shoot at the red spots," directed Berol, pointing out the nerve-ends. "Or at those greenish veins."

The detonon gun crew slammed in a shell—a shell loaded with the numbing drug heteraine instead of its usual high explosive. They aimed and fired, and as the missile tore its way into the monster's nerve fibre, the nearest group of tentacles lashed and writhed in fury. Eight, nine, ten—shot after shot ripped into the antennaes' controlling ganglia. Then the clutching, whipping arms went limp and collapsed their full two miles in length onto the pink plain beneath.

The ships circled and came back to shoot down another set of antennae. By the time they slid to a stop on the horny hide of the Mooneater itself, the doped tentacles lay in mountainous piles for several miles around them.

"Quick!" commanded Berol, the moment they were at rest. "All hands outside! Squirt more heteraine into every nerve-end you see. We must anesthetize this entire area."

Men scampered about the grounded ships with big cans of heteraine strapped to their backs, jabbing sharpened pipes into the quivering nerve-ends. In a little while that part of the Mooneater was as inert as the floor of a crater on Luna herself. Beyond the narcotized section, the rest of the tentacles could be seen in agitated motion, twisting and clutching. Walter Berol anxiously scanned the black void from which he had come, but he saw no sign

of the jet flames of his pursuers. He might accomplish his purpose yet.

After the anesthetic squads came the riggers. They unloaded the ships where they lay on the Mooneater, and by the time the first rest period had come, the derrick was up. Ten hours later, the hole was spudded in. Then the drill-bits began to grind, gnawing their way down through the horny hide of the monster like steel augers through an ancient cheese.

From time to time Fava and her steward made the rounds of the nerve-ends and shot fresh injections of the deadening drug into them. It was of utmost importance that they keep the monster numb and quiet where they worked, as its slightest shudder would have all the effect of a devastating earthquake. They might lose not only their drill-bits, but the derrick. And somewhere near about must be one of those auxiliary mouths that could engulf them all in a moment.

IT was at a depth of just seven miles that grizzled Harvey Linholm announced his drilling was through. Sticky, viscous purple blood was welling up and spreading lazily about the lip of the hole. That meant they were through the tough outer skin and down into the tenderer tissues beneath.

"Pump it out and set your casing," Berol said, and went to see about his snakes.

Under Fava's forced feeding they were monstrous serpents now, ten feet or more in length, and more fecund and voracious than ever. Selection and high-speed evolution had done miracles. They were unbeautiful worms—slender, eely creatures with forked tails and transparent skins, but they had insatiable appetites and bred at an astonishing rate. Walter Berol felt certain they would do the work he expected of them.

Berol stepped under the derrick presently and gazed down the shiny barrel of the well. To one side stood fourteen crates of selected *illi ulli*, a portable flame-cutter, and a shoulder-size container of heteraine, along with hypodermic injection pipes. The worms were hungry, as always, and squirming and hissing venomously to show their irritation at being cooped up in the long cylindrical baskets. Berol put on the heteraine container and grasped the flame-thrower, then reached for the sling that was to lower him into the depths.

A spasm of revulsion and cold fear suddenly swept over him, and for a moment he shut his eyes out of sheer horror. Thirty-seven thousand feet down into the tissues of this monster—and through a slender forty-inch hole! All the confident self-assurance that had sustained him until then oozed from the biologist. His former timidity threatened to take control again, and his resolution faltered. He was badly rattled.

For in that instant Walter Berol ceased to think of the Mooneater as a mere laboratory specimen, even though a colossal one, but rather as a living adversary. He was about to do what countless generations of men had done before him—enter into mortal hand-to-hand combat with a ruthless enemy!

Vaguely he sensed that Linholm was watching him, awaiting the signal to lower away. And back of the silent group of drillers was a small helmeted figure—Fava. She, too, was watching. And then, as in a vision, Berol was aware of the millions of helpless humans everywhere whose existence hung on his own hardihood. And Bob Tallen was on the way to stop him.

"Lower away," Walter Berol managed, and hoped dumbly that his voice did not reveal the quaver he felt in his soul.

The gleaming neochrome casing quickly turned to a dead black, as he shot past its thousands of fathoms. Down, down he plunged. Then, after what seemed centuries, his pace began to slacken and he knew he must be nearing the bottom. He ceased to feel the slick metal walls, realized he was hanging in a subterranean cavern. His next sensation was that of being plunged knee-deep in slimy mud, only the mud was warm and clinging, like a live thing.

Berol snapped on his crest lamp and looked about him. He was in a huge purple cavern, lined with slime-dripping tissue, and interlacing purple tubes told him he was looking at Gargantuan capillaries. Over in a corner was a bulbous lump of green mush—the creature's nerve stuff—a minor ganglion, no doubt, for the functioning of the antenna clump immediately overhead.

Berol stood clear and sent the sling back up. Now they would send down the baskets of *illi ulli*. Until they came, he sloshed about in the stinking mire, slashing at the nerve-leads with his machete and injecting each one with a few ounces of heteraine. By the time his serpents came, he had openings ready for their entry into the monster's nervous system.

He unhooked the first of the baskets with trembling hands, but steadied himself with the thought that he was now at the culminating moment of his great experiment. A few more steps, and he would know whether he had succeeded. He had gone too far to weaken, and he tried to shut out of his imagination the seven miles of solid organism that separated him from his kind.

THE pale serpents wriggled vigorously through the muck the moment Berol released them. Their instinct seemed to direct them unerringly, for they made straightway for the nearest nerve fibres. Berol saw their evil-looking heads nuzzle into the incisions he had made, and their forked tails give a final flip as they wriggled out of sight. Then he could hear the horrid gurgling as the half-starved reptiles gnawed into the green substance.

The tenth basket was down and unloaded before Berol felt the cavern shake ominously. That meant the first batches of snakes had penetrated the nerve-trunks beyond the anesthetized area, and that the Mooneater was feeling pain. Berol knew he must expect more of these mountainous shudders, and only hoped his cavern would not collapse until he had at least got all his snakes started. At their rate of propagation Berol was confident he had enough for his purpose.

Laboriously he made his way back to the spot beneath the trunk. Basket number eleven was due. But it was not a basket that came. It was a space-suited figure—a diminutive figure that fell with a rush, and floundered for a moment in the slime on the animal floor.

"You—Fava!" Berol exclaimed.

"Hurry—oh, hurry!" the girl cried. "Come up while there is time! Bob Tallen has come—is landing near us . . ."

The floor beneath them heaved mightily, flung them far apart. Berol's light jarred out, and it was several seconds before he could get it on again. When he did, he saw the place they were in had been squeezed to a third its former volume, and its shape completely changed.

He glanced upward at where the hole had been, but it had been smashed flat. Two lengths of the neochrome casing stuck out, twisted and bent almost beyond recognition. The Mooneater had had a violent convulsion, and the two humans inside it were trapped!

Walter Berol fought his way to Fava,

ducking under writhing capillaries and proceeding on his hands and knees at times. Fava gasped,

"He—Bob—is blasting his way in! Q-rays and flame guns . . . He burned down those antennae to the north of us . . ."

"The blundering fool!" exclaimed Walter Berol. "The one thing he should not have done. If this brute is excited at this stage, we are all lost!"

It looked as if they were indeed, for one terrific upheaval followed another in quick succession. Twice Berol was completely buried in vile semi-liquid tissue, and only his space suit saved him from suffocation. And twice he found Fava again and clung to her. At last the shudderings and quakings diminished; then ceased altogether.

It seemed a forlorn hope, but Berol thought of trying it. He jabbed viciously at his phone button, and monotonously began calling Linholm on the surface. There was a faint chance the thing's writhings might penetrate the heavy roof of monster hide over them.

Then Berol thought he heard a voice, and a little later he got Linholm.

"Things are pretty bad, Doc," Linholm was saying. "I can't help you—not for a day or so. The derrick is down . . . The 'earthquake' did that . . . Can you stick it out until I get the derrick set up again and a new hole drilled?"

Walter Berol groaned. Bob Tallen had played hell for fair.

"What about Tallen's cruiser?" Berol demanded anxiously.

"It's gone," came the answer, so faint it could hardly be heard.

"Gone away?"

"No. Gone down. It landed, blazing away, about a thousand yards to the west of us. A bunch of them tentacle things wrapped themselves around it, and the next thing I knew . . . it wasn't there. It sank plumb into the monster."

BEROL snapped off the phone and stared at Fava. Now he had the explanation of the violent upheavals. It was Bob Tallen's attack and the monster's reaction to it. Tallen's blasting at the edge of the narcotized area had awakened the beast, and it had fought back in its customary manner. The end had been the usual one—Tallen's ship had been engulfed.

The biologist sat stunned for a moment, hardly conscious that Fava was lying alongside him, clinging. His thoughts were a strange mingling of satisfaction and despair. He had inoculated the Mooneater—it would die, in time. He felt sure of that. But he and Fava were trapped, and in the tremendous convulsions that were sure to attend the monster's death agony, they would die, too. He did not mind so much for himself. But Fava . . .

Then he thought of Bob Tallen and his entombed *Sirius*. That was another bit of dramatic irony. The would-be rescuer who had brought death instead of life—and was doomed to die himself. Now he lay a thousand yards away in the corroding acids of one of the monster's minor stomachs—

Walter Berol jumped as if prodded with a bayonet. Inside the *Sirius* there might be safety! It was a race with time. Could the Mooneater digest the warship in advance of its own death struggle? Berol clambered to his feet and dragged Fava up with him.

"Come," he said, and led the girl to the west wall of their deformed cavern.

He handed her the heteraine outfit while he hung on to the flame-cutter. In a few jerky words he told her what he was trying to do, and his explanation seemed to put new life into her, though both of them knew their chances

of finding the cruiser were slim. Compasses were useless inside a creature that emanated erratic magnetic waves, and everywhere there was a hopeless jumble of intertwined blood capillaries and nerve-trunks. The two victims could easily be lost in the first hundred feet.

But they plodded on. It was five hundred feet before they came to a nerve-trunk that had any green substance left in it. The *illi ulli* had done their work well, for in the next few hundred yards they saw many mother serpents accompanied by their huge broods of infant snakes. It was not until after that, that Fava had to use heteraine shots to paralyze the tissues ahead of them.

Berol doggedly burned away or cut the barriers that they encountered. Twice he backtracked to check his orientation. It was well he did, for he discovered on both occasions he and Fava had a tendency to veer off to the north. Aside from hacking out their path, he tried not to think at all. To do that would lead to madness, for there was really no basis for hope.

CHAPTER V

Brain vs. Brawn

AT last they came to the tough stomach wall, and the breaching of it took the last erg of energy in the flame-gun. Berol tossed it into the muck, and jerked back the folds of tissue to allow some of the fuming acids within to flow past. He helped Fava through the hole, and they plunged on, thankful for their acid-resistant suits.

"Too late," said Berol grimly, as he looked up at the hulk that had been the crack cruiser *Sirius*. Her outer hull was gone, leaving only a few gaunt frames, pitted and eaten to knife-thin plates which crumbled at the touch. Corroded decks hung limply, like damp cardboard, dripping slime. All that was left of the ship was the armored central compartment that housed the gyros and the control room.

Yet so good did this man-made thing look, dilapidated and dissolving though it was in this cavern of horrors, that both Berol and Fava instinctively drew closer to it. The biologist helped the girl climb the collapsing decks, and cleared away the slimy mud that clung there. He noticed that no more of it came, and attributed that to the paralysis of this region worked by his worms.

The armored compartment seemed to be tight, so Berol carefully scraped about one of its doors until he had laid the metal bare. Then he tapped with the handle of his knife.

There was an answering tap, after a little. In a moment the door was cautiously opened, and a helmeted officer peered out. It must have been a shock to him to see all the ship outside his compartment gone, and in its place a vague blackness lit only by the crest lamp on one of the suited figures before him. He let them in, and carefully closed the door behind.

Bob Tallen stood in the center of the control room, an expression of deep concern on his face. But as he recognized Fava, he broke into a smile, though obviously a forced one.

"Thank God we found you!" he exclaimed, striding forward as if to embrace her.

"*You* found *us?*" Fava laughed merrily. "Why, you big, clumsy, heroic lummox of a meddler! If you only knew what we've gone through to find *you,* just to tell you to keep your shirt on and you'll be all right!"

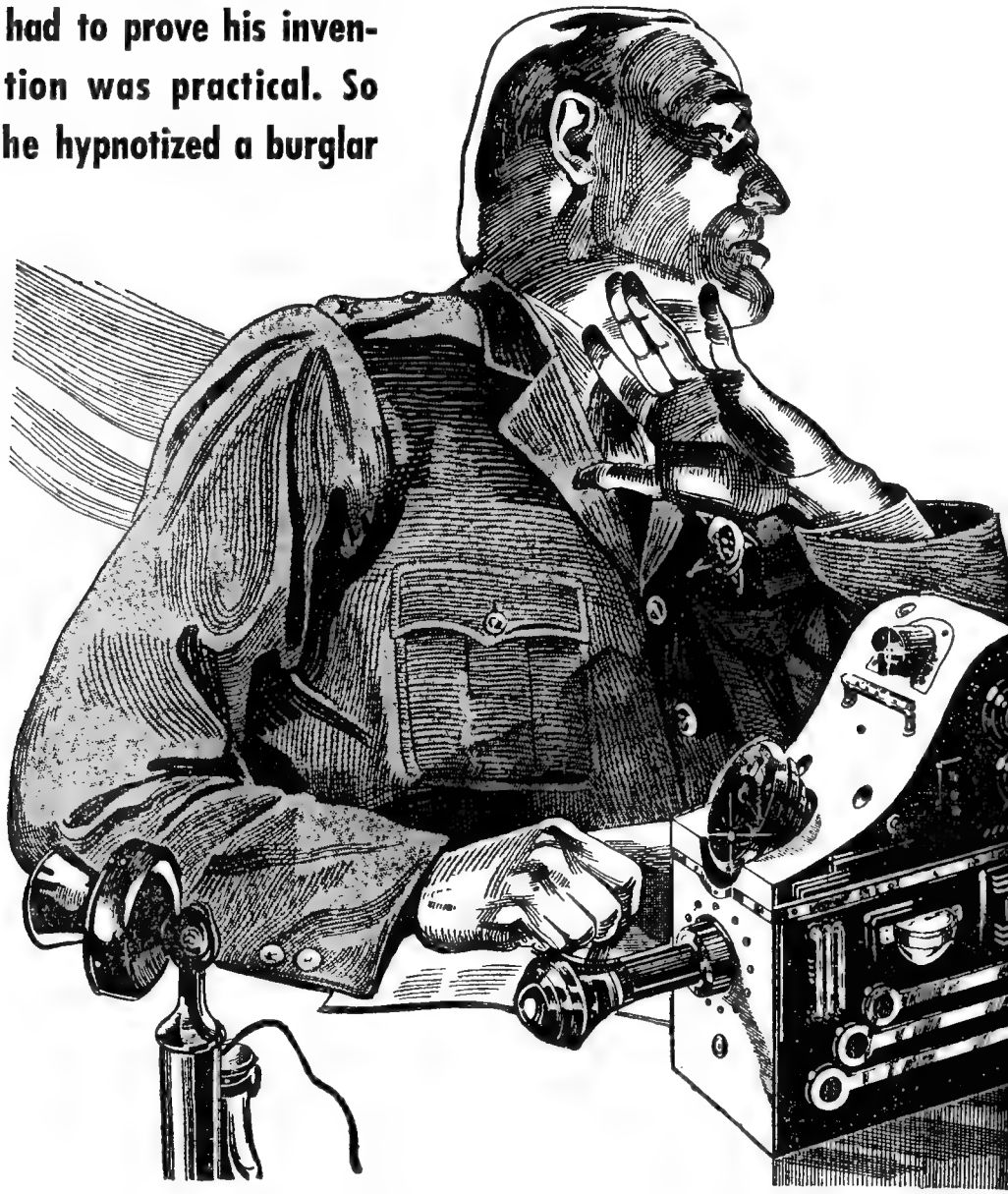
Bob Tallen's jaw dropped in sheer amazement. Then he caught on.

"Poor Favikins—I understand. But

(Concluded on page 127)

The RAY of

Professor Higginbottom had to prove his invention was practical. So he hypnotized a burglar



"Why don't you quit inventing things?" Clancy said. "None of them ever work!"

HYPNOSIS

by MILTON KALETSKY

SERGEANT O'LEARY stuck his head into Lieutenant Clancy's office. "That bug's here again, Lootenant," he announced.

Lieutenant Clancy, of the New York City police, glanced up from *Detective Thrillers Weekly*.

"Which bug?"

"The one with the inventions."

"Professor Higginbottom? Migosh, tell him I'm not here!"

Greatly dismayed, Clancy grabbed his cap and started out the back door.

"Too late, Lootenant," sighed Sergeant O'Leary. "Here he is."

Lieutenant Clancy dropped his cap and tried to be gruff with the tall, gray-haired, eager man who marched in, lugging a large box.

"I'm busy, Professor," he barked, and put his nose into *Detective Thrillers Weekly* again.

Professor Homer Higginbottom smiled a friendly greeting.

"This will take only a minute, Lieutenant."

Without invitation he opened the box and dragged forth a contraption which he spread out on Clancy's desk.

"Now please, Professor," Clancy. "I'm only a lieutenant. You should show these inventions of yours to the big shot in the department."

"Ah, but you're the only man who appreciates my work. If you like it, they'll like it, too."

Clancy muttered under his breath, "Out of nineteen thousand men on the

force, he has to pick me!"

"Sure, Perfesser," urged Sergeant O'Leary. "You oughta make inventions that'd bring you some dough."

The Professor replied with dignity.

"My inventive talents are devoted exclusively to the public welfare. I want no pecuniary reward for my work."

"Wonder what Mrs. Higginbottom thinks of *that?"* muttered Clancy. "All right, what have you this time?"

"A hypnoray gun."

"A *what* gun?"

"A hypnoray gun."

"Well, what does it do?" asked Sergeant O'Leary.

"It will take the place of revolvers."

"What! That load of junk?" squawked the sergeant. "Ain't cops got enough stuff to drag around without loadin' them down with all that? It weighs fifty pounds, I bet."

"Ah, but let me tell you what it does! The hypnoray gun shoots out a hypnotizing ray which makes criminals completely helpless and unable to move. It's harmless and much faster than a pistol and it can't injure innocent bystanders.

"All the policeman has to do is to bring the hynoptized person to the police station, where a de-hypnoray gun revives him. Of course, policemen will carry only the hypnoray gun, but here I have both the hypnoray and de-hypnoray guns in this one model."

"Sounds good," admitted Clancy, "if it works."

"Of course it works!" Professor Higginbottom was indignant.

"How many times have we heard that before, Sergeant?" asked the lieutenant sarcastically.

Professor Higginbottom flushed.

"Oh, those other things. Well—heh— But *this* one *will* work!"

"What makes it go?" Clancy asked resignedly.

"Well, it's powered by batteries which operate vacuum tubes, which periodically produce aperiodic vibrations, which interfere with thought waves and certain nerve currents. This induces hypnosis and aphasia, rendering the affected person completely helpless. Is that clear?"

"Yeah, sure," grunted the lieutenant. "Clear as a politician's speech."

"Then I'm ready to test the hypnoray gun on someone," Higginbottom announced.

"Okay," said Clancy. "O'Leary!"

His shout halted the sergeant, who was just slipping out of the room. Very reluctantly, O'Leary came back.

"Lootenant, I gotta see a guy right away, honest!"

"He can wait," said Lieutenant Clancy. "Right now, you're going to be the Professor's guinea pig.' "

"Outa nineteen thousand guys on the force, he picks me," grumbled O'Leary under his breath.

"What's that?" Lieutenant Clancy glowered at the sergeant. "What are you worried about? You know these inventions of the Professor. Nothing's going to happen."

"But *this* time somethin' *might."*

"So what? Your widow will get a pension."

"Ain't that a comfortin' thought?" growled O'Leary. "Maybe I want to go on livin'."

"Why?" demanded Clancy.

"Right now I couldn't tell ya," muttered O'Leary. "Aw right, Perfesser, whatcha want?"

The Professor fluttered over his device like a mother hen over her chicks.

"Ah—oh yes. Just run across the room."

O'Leary lumbered across the room. Professor Higginbottom pressed a button. Nothing happened.

Professor Higginbottom peered anxiously into the hypnoray gun, made

some adjustments and signaled to the sergeant. O'Leary ran again. The Professor pushed more buttons. Still nothing happened.

Fifteen minutes later, O'Leary sank exhausted onto a chair, wheezing like an unoiled tire pump. Lieutenant Clancy disgustedly watched the Professor frantically dig and delve in the depths of the hypnoray gun.

"Now look here, Professor," he said. "You invented a machine to catch bank robbers, and it didn't work. You invented a contraption to stop hit-run drivers, and *it* didn't work. You invented a dozen other gadgets and *none* of them worked. Now this.

"Why don't you stop trying to help us police? Buy yourself a house in the country and raise pigs or something. But please don't do any more inventing."

IN the homeward-bound subway crowded with belated travelers, the Professor continued to search for the defect in the hypnoray gun. Parts fell on the floor, others landed in the laps of his neighbors, but the Professor ignored their stares, glares and growls.

Suddenly he saw why the machine hadn't worked. A little wire had come loose. Quickly he tightened it and reassembled his brainchild. Getting up, he first thought of returning to the police station; then decided to wait for the next day.

By now, he reasoned, Clancy had probably gone home. The Professor sat down and continued homeward.

As he opened his door and entered the dim hall, he saw a shadowy figure move in the darkness at the other end. A burglar! A chance to test the hypnoray gun!

Swiftly the Professor raised it; and as he did so, the man lifted his hands menacingly. Fearlessly the Professor stood where he was and pressed the proper buttons.

The tubes lit up, the hypnoray guns hummed, a pale ray flashed out—and the shadowy figure stiffened and toppled over. There was a crash.

* * *

WHEN the family doctor, George Smathers, finished his examination a few hours later, he was frankly puzzled. Turning to Mrs. Higginbottom, who hovered nervously by, he asked,

"You say you arrived home a little while ago and found your husband lying here in the hall?"

"Yes, just as you see him now. Oh, Doctor, why doesn't he move and speak? Why does he stare like that?"

Dr. Smathers shook his head uncertainly.

"Very curious condition. He's uninjured, but seems to be hypnotized."

"Hypnotized?" wailed Mrs. Higginbottom. "How can we get him out of it?"

"We've got to find out who hypnotized him. By the way, what's that wreckage all over the floor?"

Mrs. Higginbottom's eyes abruptly widened in growing realization.

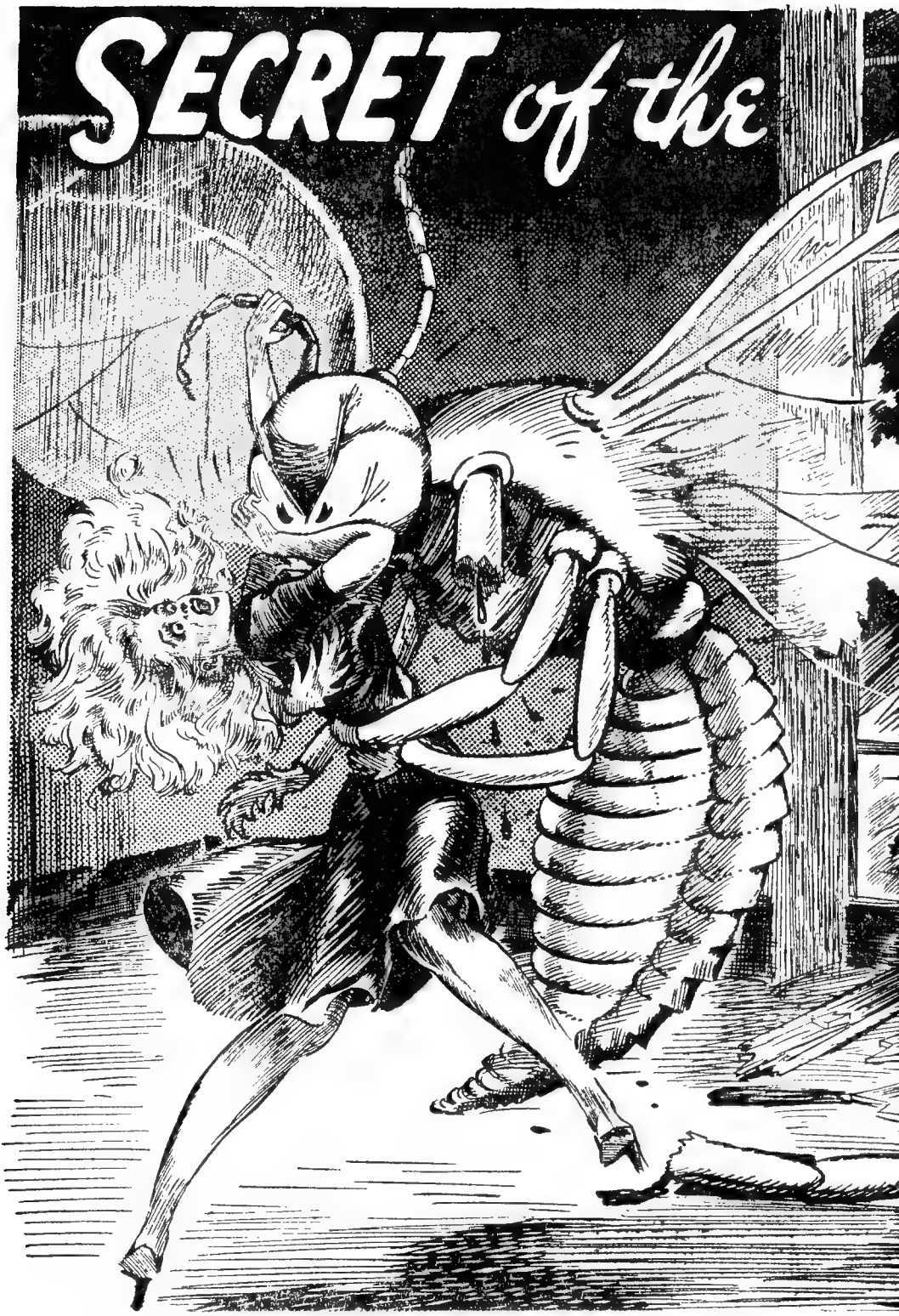
"Good heavens! That's his hypnoray gun. It's supposed to hypnotize and de-hypnotize people."

Dr. Smathers looked uncomfortable.

"I'm beginning to see what happened. He aimed the machine at that full-length mirror and it reflected the ray back at him!

"Well, when a man's hypnotized, only the hypnotist who put him into the trance can get him out of it. In this case, the 'hypnotist'—the hypnoray gun—is just a mess of useless junk. So there's no way to revive your husband, and he'll have to stay hypnotized."

"Oh, my poor Homer!" wept Mrs. Higginbottom. "After thirty years, he finally invented something that works and now he'll never know it!"



My ancient axe sheared off one of the monster's legs and I swung again, madly

MOON TREASURE

by THORNTON AYRE

"WELL, you don't believe me, do you?"

Dr. Coratti was off on another of his tantrums. In fact, ever since he'd gotten back from man's first trip to the moon, the gray-haired, nervous inventor had been anything but a prize package.

"Now father, you mustn't say such things. Of course we believe you," said Beryl, his tall, dark, amazingly calm and collected daughter.

"Yes, father, we don't doubt for a minute that you discovered a great secret on the moon."

That was Lucy, his younger daughter. Lucy is blond and pert, and besides she's my wife, and I ought to know.

Dr. Coratti, however, was not mollified. He threw his napkin on the dinner table.

"And you, Curt Fowley," he de-

WHAT strange treasure from the moon could be so important as to warrant wholesale murder over possession of a worthless-looking weed?

manded, "what do you, as an attorney, think?"

I tried to be diplomatic. "Dad," I said, "as long as it is a discovery on which you haven't filed claim, there's a possibility that the criminals you're worrying about may steal it from you."

"Steal, fiddlesticks!" Coratti snorted. "Nobody's going to steal anything from me!" And he got up in a huff and strode from the room. Headed for his laboratory outside, we knew. The laboratory where none of us was welcome.

Well, Coratti didn't show up the rest of the evening, so we three just sat around the lounge and watched a teleplay from New York; that is, when we were not wondering what the hell had got into the cantankerous inventor. The estate was not the sort of place to make one cheerful, either: old-fashioned, rambling, true enough, but there was too much gray paint on the buildings, too somber an overtone that hung over everything.

The laboratory was a large barnlike building, a kind of hangar for experimental and constructional purposes—there Coratti had built his rocket ship. A river curled about the far end of broad acres.

The only inhabitants of the place, outside Dr. Coratti and Beryl, were the Butsons, manservant and housekeeper—a couple of hard-bitten old devils who had passed their golden wedding in service.

It was around ten-thirty when Lucy, who had been uneasy all evening, said she was going to find out what her old man was doing. In five minutes she was back, hurriedly, swinging the lounge door wide. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes bright with alarm.

"Dad—in the laboratory!" she gasped out. "He's dead! *Dead . . .*"

Beryl and I jumped up. I caught Lucy tightly.

"Wait a minute! Take it easy! He can't be dead; it isn't—"

"He *is* dead!" she shouted hysterically. "Lying there on the floor—Oh, Curt, it's horrible . . ."

With my arm still about her we went outside. Beryl went ahead of us. She stood staring at Dr. Coratti's sprawling form on the laboratory floor when Lucy and I came in.

"Yes," Beryl said quietly. "He is dead."

I still could not believe it. I tested the pulse, but there was not the slightest flicker; nor any respiration. I turned the doctor over gently and stared at his ashen face and fixed, staring eyes. His mouth was twisted into a sardonic grin, as though he had contemplated something grimly amusing as his last mortal act.

Thereafter I had my hands full. Lucy was utterly inconsolable, weeping and shuddering by turns. Coratti had understood her sensitive nature better than anyone else, and they had always been close. Beryl was different. The event had shocked her, it was true, but she was calm enough. While I tried to convince Lucy there was nothing we could do about it, Beryl went in and phoned for the doctor.

"Heart failure," the medico said, when he'd finished his examination. "Not at all uncommon in a man of fifty-eight; happens suddenly. I'd say he had been undergoing tremendous strain of some sort . . . Well, I guess we all have these things to face. Good night."

BUT the conviction of foul play persisted with me. I even went around the laboratory hangar outside to look for footprints, but of course there were none. When I got back to the hangar, Beryl had gone but Lucy was still there, seated on a chair, her tear-misted eyes gazing blankly in front of her.

"Well, did you find anything?" she asked in an absent voice.

"Find anything?" I pretended innocence. "Such as?"

"You went to look for signs of an attack, didn't you?" she demanded, getting to her feet. "Didn't you?" She caught my arm tightly.

I admitted it, and looked at her taut face. It was not grief-stricken now but set and hard.

"He was alone all evening," Lucy went on. "Curt, it's sheer nonsense to think that he died, just like that! Father was thin and nervous, yes; but he was wiry, used to strain and— Well, maybe he was right, after all. Maybe those criminals he worried about did steal his secret! Maybe they did kill him!"

I put my arm around her. "Take it easy, child. If something's up, we'll get to the bottom of it."

Heart failure or murder, I wasn't going to let my wife get hysterical. Particularly when Coratti's corpse on a table, over which Beryl had temporarily thrown a sheet, stood out like a sore thumb.

So I tried to show concern and poked into this and that, not that it meant much to me, as I'm not much of a scientist. The hangar was stocked with endless jars of chemicals, machinery, electrical equipment, and at the far end there was even a botanical section. Lucy joined me at that point, and we stood looking in puzzled silence at a soil bed full of remarkably strange plants. Funny thing was, they were all *dead.*

"Queer," Lucy observed, frowning. "I never knew Dad was interested in plants. Unless—unless he brought them back with him from the moon," she added quickly. "That may be it."

I looked at them closely. They looked as plants do when transplanted during hot sunshine. The soil around them was pretty loose.

"Your guess is as good as any," I sighed. "Unattractive looking plants, too—rather like cactus. Don't seem to be of much use."

So that was that.

On the whole we passed a pretty bad night, but at least Lucy was calmer and more composed the following morning. I was prepared to give all the help I could to the funeral when an early phone call put a stop to my intentions. I was needed immediately in the city on legal business.

Ten minutes later I was in my car headed back to town. The law is a remorseless machine, and it kept me tied to a stuffy courtroom for more than three days before I was able to finish the case. I went to our city apartment to get my bag before heading out to the country again, when the telephone rang.

To my surprise Beryl's voice came over the receiver—but it did not sound like the Beryl I knew. She was hurried, excited.

"Curt? Thank goodness I've got you at last! I've tried before—"

I interrupted her. "Anything happened? Lucy all right?"

"Yes, yes—she's all right. Listen, Curt—this is urgent! I've just found something among Dad's effects which explains that great secret he talked about. I don't like being in the country here with Lucy and having this secret around. We might be attacked—criminals, I mean. Are you coming back or shall we drive in?"

"I'll be right with you," I said. "Meanwhile, hold tight."

IT was an hour later that evening when I swept into the driveway of the old estate and pulled up with a shriek of brakes. I had only just got out of the car when I distinctly heard

a revolver shot — and then another from somewhere in the rear of the old place. In another moment I was running under the trees along the shale path to the expanse of grounds at the rear.

I was just in time to see three heavily muffled figures go racing across the sweep of lawn in the starlight, to vanish in the direction of the hangar.

"Curt! Curt, is that you?"

I twirled around as I realized it was Beryl's voice, full of anguish, half choking.

Running through the shadowy dark I found her at last, sprawled helplessly on the floor between the open French windows. She was trying to raise herself. I caught her in my arms, lifted her head and shoulders, and she coughed thickly. In the starlight I saw her light-colored dress was darkly stained across her left breast.

"Curt. . . . listen. I haven't much time." She plucked at my sleeve with a quivering hand. "They shot me . . . twice. The secret . . ."

"What is the secret?" I panted. "Beryl—in God's name—"

I raised her higher, and blood flecked her lips for a moment.

"The—the weeds . . ." She sighed; then with a tremor she relaxed and her head fell back.

I knelt there, too stupefied to move. Beryl was dead, shot by those damned —well, shot by *whom?*

I looked up sharply at a sudden blasting roar through the night; followed with my eyes a cream of sparks climbing into the darkened sky. Dr. Coratti's rocket ship, obviously driven by the murderers of Beryl!

The killers had gone off into space in the only rocket ship known to Earthmen, and the secret of its motive power —as far as I knew—was locked in the dead brain of Dr. Coratti.

CHAPTER II

The Flying Horrors

IT took me several seconds to gather my wits. Then I lifted Beryl's dead body to the library divan and switched on the lights. There was a scene of infinite disorder. Chairs were overturned, rugs rumpled, papers scattered wholesale. It was obvious Beryl had made a desperate fight for her life.

After a while I got Butson and his wife to come in. The two caretakers seemed too appalled to speak when they saw Beryl's corpse and the blood on her dress. And when they did, they couldn't tell me anything.

"That's a big help," I snapped. "Well, where is my wife all this time?"

"She went out, Mr. Fowley, for a walk—about two hours ago, it'll be, by now."

So, naturally, that made me even more jittery.

Lucy had not returned by the time the police came. There was the coroner, one or two plainclothes men, and a shrewd-eyed little man who introduced himself as Inspector Davison. His questions brought forth nothing more than I had already learned. The coroner laconically observed that Beryl had died from bullet wounds through chest and stomach. After that he left, bag in hand.

By then I was all set to explode. I can stand just so much complacence, and then I blow up. I would have, in fact, if Lucy hadn't come in just then through the open French windows.

She stood blinking, obviously dazzled by the light and confused by the presence of the police. I looked at her quickly. She was dressed in her fur coat and little hat, but she had rubber ankle boots on. They were stained to the tops with yellow mud, still moist.

"Curt—" She came over to me quickly. "Curt, what has happened here? What are these—"

She stopped, her hand going in horror to her throat as she caught sight of Beryl's dead body still on the divan. She collapsed right there in my arms, and we had to spend about ten minutes bringing her round again.

I had to explain everything as gently as I could. She listened, taking it all in, and closed her eyes once or twice in horror.

The inspector got on the job then. "Where did you go, Mrs. Fowley? I'd like to know, if you don't mind."

"Why, I went for a walk by the river," Lucy said. "I felt I wanted to clear up my mind a bit, after the funeral." She stopped and thrust out her rubber-booted feet. "I suppose you want proof of what I say? Well, there it is. The river tow-path is covered with yellow mud like this."

Inspector Davison nodded slowly, his keen little eyes studying her face. For that matter, I was studying it too. Something had happened to Lucy since I had left her three days before. She seemed now to be laboring under a tremendous strain. Being accustomed to her every mood, I could sense it clearly.

Davison pondered a moment, then he turned away abruptly and signaled one of his men to accompany him. They went out of the room and started an investigation outside again.

"Lucy," I whispered. "Lucy, dearest, what's wrong? What's happened to you since I saw you last? You're different—so different!"

She looked at me directly then, and though her tongue again gave denials I saw terror—yes, terror—and with it a certain stubbornness in those blue eyes of hers.

"You're being silly, Curt," she said rather sharply, getting to her feet. "What I want to know is what did Beryl find out that she was so anxious to tell you? When I left her she was reading. The minute my back was turned, she must have started snooping again."

"Snooping? Oh, you mean going through your father's papers and effects . . . ."

I TURNED as the inspector came in again.

"Tell me, Mr. Fowley, have you any idea what those weeds are in the laboratory? Was your father a botanist, Mrs. Fowley?"

"We believe they are probably lunar plants," I answered him quietly. "But what possible connection could they have with the murder?"

"An investigation has many angles," Davison said. "I'll have a botanist here to look these plants over and classify them, if possible. In the meantime you will both stay on hand here. I shall leave men around the house on twenty-four hour duty."

So again, that was that.

* * *

TWO nights after Beryl's funeral things began with a vengeance! Lucy and I had gone to bed about midnight, and I must have fallen asleep immediately. But I was awakened suddenly by a strange rushing sound, accompanied by an unearthly wailing as from a dungeon of damned souls.

I stiffened, listening, awakening by degrees to awareness. There was not just a single cry but many of them—remote, unearthly. I sat up quickly and twisted around; then I got my second shock. Lucy had gone! I groped for the light switch, but before I found it I heard the dry leathery beat of giant wings momentarily against the great window of the bedroom.

Forgetting all about lights, I floundered out of bed and tore back the curtains. The night was a wild one, with a moon nearly at her last quarter riding the ragged deeps. It was an incredible sight I saw then. Some five or six things with mighty batlike wings outspread—and bodies similar to those of an ant — paraded across my vision. Ants with bats' wings! What the hell was this?

As I watched, they circled against the moon like something out of prehistoric times. They climbed up, flew down to the grounds, circled with their ungodly cries.

I snapped out of my trance and blundered for dressing gown and slippers, shouting Lucy's name as I did so. There was no response. As I made for the door, I noticed her gown and slippers were absent too.

Then came a different sound—that of smashing glass and a sudden desperate scream, clearly Lucy's. The noise seemed to come from the library downstairs. I went down the stairs like a madman, missed the bottom step and crashed my length in the hall. Up again in a flash I whipped up a medieval ax from the hall armory and charged into the library.

The light was full on, and I was paralyzed with shock for a second at what I saw. Lucy was fighting desperately with threshing arms and legs against the mighty pincered forelegs of a monstrosity that was now more antlike than ever. It had obviously crashed right through the glass of the French windows to make its attack.

In that second of horror I absorbed the things outlined. The mighty membranous wings, folded now like a cape, enormous eyes, pincered forelegs and powerfully jointed legs behind, leveled its armored body upward. It reared far above my wife, bending her slender body backward with spine-cracking force. Lucy gave a gasping scream and struggled with renewed desperation, screaming huskily.

I whirled my battle-ax then with blind fury, slashed clean through the leg that crushed around Lucy's back. She sank senseless to the carpet, a watery ichor* from the thing drenching her torn gown and nightdress. I struck again, and again, the ax blade flashing in each sweep.

I AM pretty powerful and I worked to good effect, insane fury helping me plenty. I caught the thing in a vital spot at last, struck it a blow in its underparts which sent it flapping in blind agony through the broken window. It rose unsteadily, sank down, then was caught by its hideous companions. They went sailing off into the ragged sky.

Drenched in sweat, I dropped my ax with a clatter and wheeled back into the room. I heard revolver shots as I did so. I was examining Lucy for injuries when two of the plainclothes men supposedly on guard burst in. One of them was named Lewis, I remembered.

"What in hell happened here?" he demanded, staring with wide eyes.

"We nearly got killed, that's all," I retorted, heaving Lucy's collapsed weight into my arms. "Where the hell were you?"

"On the grounds, of course. We saw those things flying around, but we figured somebody would come *out* of the house to meet them. Then we heard the glass smash. Never reckoned one of the damned things had come in and —"

"All right, all right," I growled. "Take a look around. That blasted

* Ichor—a pungent, watery substance akin to the life-fluid.—Ed.

thing half killed my wife."

"But what were they?" Lewis scratched his head. "Looked like bats or something— Hello, what's this?" He looked beyond the severed ant leg on the carpet and picked up a book.

I glanced at it. It was Jules Verne's "A Trip to the Moon," oddly enough.

"I dunno," I grunted, shifting Lucy more securely in my grip. "Tell Butson and his wife to come up to the bedroom, will you? They're around some place; I heard them as I came down here. Better have your men look around the grounds for some explanation for all this."

"Yeah. You bet!"

With the help of the Butsons it took me ten minutes to get Lucy to her senses again. She wasn't injured, thank heaven, beyond a few scratches and heavy bruises which bandages and ointment could take care of. She lay staring at me in vague wonder when she opened her eyes, then a look of appalled horror came to her face as she suddenly remembered.

"You're all right, dearest," I murmured thankfully, gripping her cold hands. "They've gone—whatever they were."

"I didn't even have a chance . . . I couldn't sleep, so I went down to get a book—"

"Verne's 'Trip to the Moon'?" I put in briefly.

"Yes . . . I dropped it, I suppose. I heard what I thought was the wind rising — then the glass suddenly smashed in, and—"

"Wait!" I interrupted her quickly. "The curtains were not drawn and the light was on? The creatures could have seen you from the outside?"

"Yes, I suppose they could."

"Hm-m. They must have had a reason for that attack, and I'll find out what it is if I stay here forever!"

I thought for a moment, an odd idea chasing around my brain. Presently I asked her,

"What possessed you to read Verne's 'To the Moon', anyway?"

Lucy shrugged. "Why not? It's a good yarn—but my main reason was to pass the time in seeing how far Verne had antipicated Dad's rocket-traveling secret."

"But — but you don't know your father's secret of rocket travel."

"What gave you *that* idea? Of course I know it! He told it to me and to Beryl when he discovered it—but he told us to let it go no further. So we did as he asked. Matter of fact, the duplicate plans are in the laboratory safe. Beryl came across them just after Dad was put in the mausoleum."

THAT made me flush. "Holding out on me, huh?"

Lucy ignored that. "Why would you say they attacked me?" she asked irritably.

"I don't know," I answered slowly. "Those flying things were not of this world; I'm sure of that. Maybe they were Selenites."*

"Selenites!"

"I'm going to find out what I can," I said briefly. I turned to Butson and his wife. "You two can go now, thanks. You'll be safe enough while I'm gone, Lucy. I'll be on the grounds within earshot, and I'll see if anything unusual happens."

She nodded and relaxed. I scrambled into a few clothes, a hat and overcoat, then went outside and caught up with the plainclothes men snooping around under the trees.

"Anything?" I asked Lewis.

"Nope—except for queer bird footmarks where that thing landed near the French window. Nothing else."

* Selenites—Moon people.—Ed.

"The things came from the moon; I'll swear to it," I muttered. "They must be able to cross space somehow. I figured there might be somebody on the grounds directing them or something. We'll keep on looking, anyway."

"Okay. Maybe you've got something there."

But it did not seem that I had. We wandered around for half an hour or more, flashing our torches at intervals. The estate covered a pretty wide area of ground, and it took us a considerable time to zigzag about. It was as we were slowly returning toward the house that Lewis caught my arm tightly. Immediately we all became still.

Through the thick undergrowth we could see a dim figure crouching down in a more open part of the grounds. The waning moonlight was quite inadequate to reveal him clearly—if it was a *he*. It had no shape, so heavily was it muffled up. The figure seemed to be on its knees, burrowing steadily into the earth, and using a torch very cautiously at intervals.

"On him!" rapped out Lewis suddenly—and we plunged forward.

But something happened. The unknown jumped up, whirled around, and fired something that sent a fine spray toward us. I caught a glimpse of the figure's face—long, thin, pallid. Then it seemed as though the earth closed in on me from every side . . .

CHAPTER III

The Riddle Deepens

THE next thing I knew, somebody was chafing my wrists. I stared dazedly upward in the reflected light of a torch, to see Lucy's anxious face bending over mine. Behind her, less distinct, were Lewis and his men.

"Lucy!" I cried. "How did you get here? Ouch, my head!"

I got up dizzily, running my eye over her. She was fully dressed now, or appeared to be. Anyway, she had bundled on her fur coat, scarf and little hat.

Lewis said rather grimly, "She revived us, too."

"What's the meaning of this?" I asked her shortly. "I thought I left you in your room."

"Sure you did—two and a half hours ago! I got worried at the lapse of time. I came to look for you, found you and these men out cold, so I rushed in the house to get some brandy and revive you."

I looked at her steadily. I had noticed something peculiar. The flashlight shining into her face had failed to make the pupils of her eyes contract. They were wide, gaping pools of black, with a tiny little rim of blue around them.

"What are you staring at, Curt?" she asked suddenly.

"Your eyes. Looks as though you're —drugged."

"Oh, that! I took some sleeping tablets to settle my nerves, but they didn't seem to have much effect—especially when I was worrying about you. But Curt, never mind me! What happened to you, and these men?"

"We were attacked, and somebody has got a mighty powerful scientific weapon with which to defend himself. It ejects a paralyzing fluid. It put us out like lights—" I gestured suddenly. "Let's get inside. We can do no more out here until daylight. You boys sticking around out here?" I asked them.

"Yeah," Lewis retorted. "Maybe we'll find out what that guy was digging for."

Lucy looked vaguely surprised at this last remark, but I caught her arm and led her into the house, back to the bedroom again. First thing I did was

check up on the box containing the sleeping tablets. There were two short, certainly. I distinctly remembered there had been half a dozen, because I'd intended buying more. Now there were only four.

"Curt, don't you believe me?" Lucy asked quietly, watching me.

I turned to her sharply. She had pulled off her fur coat now, to reveal that she was still in her rent and torn night clothing.

"It's getting so that I don't know whom to believe!" I retorted. "I've no reason to doubt you—yet I felt I ought to check up. Beats me why two tablets of this strength haven't even made you sleepy!"

"They have—now," she said wearily, throwing herself on the bed. "My fears for you kept me awake before— Curt! Curt, dearest!"

She gripped my arm and pulled me down to a sitting position on the bed.

"Please don't keep looking at me like this, as though—as though you think I have something to do with all this. It's as bad for me as it is for you. Just what *are* you thinking?"

"Just that whoever it was on the grounds is probably the murderer of your father," I replied slowly.

Lucy looked at me steadily for a moment, then she gave a little sigh and relaxed. Her eyelids drooped, and in a moment she dropped into slumber.

Of course sleep is the easiest thing in the world to imitate, and had she wanted— Damn my suspicions! I got up, cursed myself for ever daring to suspect her at all.

I did not go back to bed. I finished dressing and spent the rest of the time until daylight seated in a chair, smoking and thinking.

I COULD see from Lucy's expression at breakfast that she resented my suspicions of the night, so I said little that would recall the matter to her mind.

Toward mid-morning we got a diversion, for Inspector Davison returned with a florid-faced, white-haired individual in immaculate attire, whom he introduced as Dr. Henry Stanson, an eminent botanist.

"Took me some time to locate the doctor," the inspector explained. "We'll go right down to the laboratory, if you don't mind."

I followed them leisurely, with Lucy looking after me rather wonderingly. In the lab I found Stanson on his knees, peering at the plants. Finally he yanked one out, jabbed a needle in the still moist root and extracted a quantity of sap. Getting up, he narrowed his eyes over globules of moisture which he tested in his portable equipment.

"What are they? New sort of dock* leaves?" I asked interestedly.

The white head shook briefly. "This isn't a plant that has grown on this world. It isn't even a tropical one. In these days, they are all classified from pole to pole. This stuff"—he raised the glass phial—"is concentrated drug of some kind. A tremendously powerful sedative, I'd say. I guess bromides would be seltzer water by comparison."

"Fatal?" Davison asked keenly.

Stanson mused. "Well, that depends. I can't find out much from these few details. I'll have to check over in my laboratory."

"Inspector," I said quietly, "would you object very much if I accompanied you and Dr. Stanson to his laboratory? I'd like to see what his tests reveal."

He looked surprised. "Why no, there's nothing against that. You evidently don't think your wife will be in further danger, then? From flying

* Dock leaves—leaves similar to those of buckwheat.—Ed.

monsters?" he asked grimly.

"Oh, so you know about them?" I demanded.

"My men told me everything when I arrived. Most interesting sidelight. However, I think there is little chance of any danger during the daytime. We'll be getting along to the car. Join us when you're ready."

I hurried back to Lucy. She gave me a rather chilly glance.

"I've got to go back to the city with the inspector," I said briefly. "Just some routine questioning, you know. I'll be back later."

She got to her feet. "Curt, are you *sure* that is the reason you are going?"

"Eh? But of course—"

"Or is it to build up some filthy suspicion against me?" she blazed. "Do you think I'm blind, that I can't see you suspect me of some rotten intrigue somewhere? You take the simplest little thing and twist it into a guilty motive to—"

"Lucy!" I caught her tightly. "Lucy, I never said anything yet to make you blow up like that! It's your own conscience that's doing it, not anything I've done! I'm simply following every lead I can to clear up this mess. Please understand that!"

"Then it's *not* questioning you're going for?"

"No," I admitted quietly. "I'm going to get an analysis of those laboratory weeds . . . See you later."

I left her with that, sat in morose silence between Stanson and the inspector as we drove into town. Matter of fact, the thing that had propelled me on this errand had been the botanist's reference to drugs. I was still haunted by the memory of Lucy's eyes the previous night. And she *was* hiding something: her latest uncalled-for outburst made me reasonably sure of it. Pretty damnable business, to have to suspect one's own wife!

WE lunched and then went to Stanson's private laboratory at the Botanical Institute. He took about two hours making all his experiments, testing the sap on a white mouse from the adjoining experimental annex. At the end of it all, the inspector and I were still interested, but puzzled.

"Well, Doctor, how are we fixed?" Davison asked, his eye on the clock.

Stanson sighed. "I've got as far as I can. This sap, if we could only get it in large quantities, would present the medical profession with a most useful addition. It is a drug, as I said before, and reacts strongly on the nervous system according to the amount given.

"In extreme amounts it could kill. In other varying amounts, it might produce effects ranging from complete insensibility to pain, to a complete control over the nervous system. As some drugs can either benefit or kill—adrenalin, for example—so can this one, according to quantity."

"Insensibility to pain, eh?" the inspector mused. "That wouldn't be an addition to medical science. We've got drugs already that do that."

"I know—that is only *one* of the effects, as I pointed out. The real usefulness would come in its ability to *control* the nervous system. If this drug were injected in given quantity into the bloodstream, a man could, say, control his nerves so accurately as to make his hair stand on end, move his eyes independently of one another, perspire or shiver at will, change the color of his eye pigment, alter his heartbeats—why, there's no end to what he could do."

"Hm-m," the inspector muttered. "This is possibly the secret which was stolen from Dr. Coratti when he was murdered. Also, it is possible that Coratti brought the weeds originally

from the moon."

"I'm sure he did," I said. "And it is possible that criminals would like to know where they could get more of these weeds. They could start a racket in medicine unparalleled in history, besides the things they could do with them themselves. They might even be able to change their appearance after a dose of the drug."

"Quite possible," admitted Stanson.

I said no more, for an astounding thought had stolen across my brain. Lucy had been drugged. Sleeping tablets? Quite possibly; but just as possibly—weed extract.

We had been attacked on the grounds and Lucy had revived us, stressing worry as to my whereabouts as her reason for being in the grounds at all. The indeterminable figure burrowing in the soil? Shapeless fur coat? Could Lucy have had the time to leave the bedroom after I'd left her? Sure—we'd wandered around for an hour and a half. But *why* would she have left the bedroom? And *was* it she, anyway . . .

"Something struck you?"

The inspector's voice broke my meditations. I looked at Stanson.

"Suppose," I said, "these plants were normal and strong. They could not give off their sap without its being extracted, could they?"

"Certainly they could. Look at the needles on the leaves. They would sting in the style of a common nettle. There are two possible reasons why these plants died—one, because they failed to take root properly; or else because so much sap was taken out of them by somebody. The latter theory seems the more likely."

"Well, thanks a lot," the inspector said finally. "We've got to be getting along. Send in your account to headquarters, will you, Doctor? You satisfied, Mr. Fowley?"

"I guess so," I nodded. "Doesn't seem we've gotten very far, though."

I THINK I threw Inspector Davison off the scent there. I wanted to reason this out for myself, before getting Lucy in a possible jam. So I effected an air of bewilderment over the whole proceedings as Davison accompanied me in the car back to the Coratti estate. He saw me inside and then departed about his business.

I walked into the lounge, slapping the newspaper I'd bought in town carelessly against my leg. Lucy tossed down her book and eyed me levelly.

"Well, did they ask you many *questions?*"

"I found out about the plants, anyway," I retorted. "They're able to produce change in a human body. For instance, you or I could change into something else under the influence of their sap."

"So that's what you're thinking!" she said bitterly. "You think I drugged myself with plant sap, eh? That's what you thought last night, too! You believe it was *I* who attacked you in the grounds!"

"Perhaps you've some idea who else it could have been?" I demanded. "Think how all this looks to *me!* Why don't you come out into the open and explain things before I find them out for myself?"

"I suppose," she asked dryly, "I shot Beryl, too."

"I know you didn't. I saw other people do that— But you do know something!" I caught her shoulders, forced her to her feet. "You little fool, Lucy, can't you remember for a minute that I'm your husband, that I'm willing to go through anything to help you if need be?"

Her lips set. "I don't want your help, Curt—and I resent your beastly

suspicions. Anyway, the whole thing's idiotic. You're trying to suggest that under the influence of drug I can change myself like — like a chameleon . . ."

"Maybe. The figure that attacked could have been you—and so could its face, for that matter."

"Oh, you're impossible!"

She swung away, flushing, and stood gazing out of the window at the man standing idly about the grounds. I hesitated, about to say something to her. Then I shrugged and snatched up the paper I'd brought, and glanced through it for the first time.

The headlines smote me immediately:

MYSTERY CRIME RING
AT WORK

I read the column with a frown. Though it was possibly miles apart from the mystery in which I was involved, it had nevertheless a reminiscent scientific tang about it. At my silence Lucy turned, came over and read over my shoulder. She was interested enough to repeat the column in a low voice.

The rapid development of a new criminal organization is causing police much concern. There are distinct evidences of a racket being waged against big industrialists. By some curious process of an undoubtedly scientific nature, the criminal behind the activity is able to learn the innermost secrets of big industries, which he then sells to commercial rivals.

Such a system is bound in time to undermine several big firms whose names are household words in this country. As yet the authorities cannot understand how the criminal is able to learn secrets which are inside four walls, or how he is able to find out what takes place at secret board meetings. A new style of radio detection is suspected, but has yet to be proved.

"So," I murmured, "we're not the only folks with a mystery!"

MY attempt to be genial was lost on Lucy. She read the column again to herself, compressed her lips.

"What's the matter? Know something about it?" I asked her bluntly.

"Of course not. I was just thinking that the criminals who shot Beryl and who possibly murdered father might be behind this."

"Those killers went off into space," I reminded her briefly. "And a ship like that could not return to any part of Earth without being noticed."

"But why should they be the *only* criminals?" Lucy demanded. "The ones that shot Beryl may have been only a section of a larger gang. The other members are possibly the ones who are doing this scientific work of learning secrets; the ones who probably killed father.

"One of them might even have been the person who attacked you in the grounds last night. Remember, he had a paralyzing gun, you said. That proves he was at least a scientist."

"Yeah—that's right," I admitted slowly. I pondered it for a moment, then I made up my mind.

"Lucy, it seems to me that we can never know the truth about all this until we know *why* those crooks rushed off into space. It is pretty certain that they headed for the moon, and we can only know the answer by going to the moon ourselves!"

"We haven't a space machine," Lucy said quickly.

"We *can* have one. You said yourself there are duplicate plans in the lab."

She looked startled for a moment. "Why yes, but— Well, how do you even propose to start? Think of the materials we'll need."

"Your dad managed it; so can we. We're not short of money, and I think it's a good way to get things moving. We may stick here forever otherwise."

I turned and strode for the door, but to my surprise Lucy caught my arm. The frozen coldness seemed to have gone out of her face. Instead she had become appealing, desperately appealing. It takes a lot of purpose to refuse a woman when they put on an act.

"Curt, I don't think we should waste time and money doing this. It will take too long, and it can't achieve any good purpose. Don't forget the curse that flying to the moon brought to this house, and—"

"Lucy," I said, "I am ordinarily a patient man. But right now, I crave action!"

I thrust her aside and strode across to the laboratory. The plans were there, sure enough, and the formula for the fuel; but I realized I was not engineer enough to understand them. All I could do was send them to an engineering firm and have them deliver the finished parts in sections. I rang up Inspector Davison and told him of my idea—that it would be better to go after the crooks than wait for them to turn up. He agreed and that was that.

That Lucy did not like any part of the idea I could see full well, though she did not refer to it again. In fact, it was her utter silence that showed me her displeasure so clearly. We sat like a couple of deaf mutes after dinner that evening.

BUT the radio newscaster snapped us to attention quick enough.

"Reports are coming in from various sections of the country about strange bird life which has appeared in both urban and rural districts."

The teleplate revealed unmistakable shots of the giant monsters that had attacked Lucy the previous night.

"The birds resemble pterodactyls, prehistoric flying reptiles. Scientists are going to investigate in an effort to classify the creatures. They consider it possible that these birds may have escaped from some corner of the globe which has thus far escaped exploration."

"So they're still around!" I breathed, glancing at Lucy's drawn white face. "Wonder what in heck they're looking for? We've got to keep our eyes peeled."

She nodded slowly, but whatever she was going to say was cut short by the newscaster's next words.

"As already announced in earlier bulletins, a new criminal organization has been uncovered in this country. Further investigation has shown that radio devices, at first suspected to be the criminals' means of learning guarded commercial secrets, are *not* responsible! In rooms especially guarded and spotted with radio detectors, secrets have still been learned. Meanwhile, the investigation is continuing."

I switched the radio off. "More I think of this, the more I think you're right, Lucy," I muttered. "About the crooks being responsible, I mean. Is it possible that the great secret your dad found is this very one the criminals are using?"

"Possibly," Lucy frowned. "But I still can't see why you're sticking your neck out! Haven't we had enough grief already?"

CHAPTER IV

Space Ship Return

ALTOGETHER it was tough going thereafter. Nothing seemed to get things going, and my efforts to get Inspector Davison to let us return to town were unavailing.

All I could obtain was permission to go with a plainclothes escort into town, so that I could keep in touch with my legal affairs. This enabled me to become more friendly with Inspector Davison, also. But Davison still withheld permission for Lucy and me to leave the Coratti residence.

"Can't be done, Fowley," he said seriously, as I tackled him in his city office. "This case is unique, and you know enough of the law yourself to realize that suspects in a murder which involves scientific implications must be confined to the scene of the murder for a period of six months.

"If nothing happens by then and no culprit is found—if the rocket ship does not return to Earth, that is—you are automatically adjudged innocent, and your wife too. But by then you may have gotten your own space machine finished, and we can do something."

I nodded resignedly. "Well, there it is. Have you got any leads yet?"

"Not many," he sighed. "It's so complex. Your wife is attacked by giant birds; you and my men are attacked by a person with scientific weapons—weapon, anyway. Now I'm inclined to think that there may be a connection between the mystery at the residence and the crime ring that is operating at the moment."

"So am I," I said slowly. "I believe that it might be the secret Dr. Coratti discovered, and which was stolen from him after his death."

"You do?" Davison looked at me keenly. "Do you believe Dr. Coratti died from heart failure?"

"That's what the medico said," I answered him steadily.

"Hm-m—If this *is* Coratti's secret—this power to look into secret meetings through solid walls—how is it that while they were about it, the criminals only stole *that* secret, yet left behind the plans for a space ship—plans which you are now using?"

"Plenty of reasons for that," I said. "The art of probing through walls may not have been in a written plan, nor might the plan have been in the *laboratory* safe, if there even was such a plan. Again, the criminals did not need the constructional designs of a space ship. They had one already designed—and used it!"

"Hm-m—I see your point. Well, guess the only answer is to fly to the moon, after all. Any progress yet?"

I nodded. "I sent in the plans a week ago and got the first consignment by freight yesterday. I'm going to spend the week-end putting parts together."

"Good! Sooner you finish the job, the better I'll like it."

I left him soon after that. When I got back to the country house Lucy had nothing of moment to report, but at dinner she rather surprised me.

"You mean to go ahead with this insane idea of building a second rocket ship, I suppose?"

"Naturally. One consignment's here already, isn't it?"

"Two!" she retorted. "Some electrical machinery was delivered this afternoon. I had the men throw the crates in the hangar."

"For the daughter of the man who invented space travel, that was damned considerate of you," I commented dryly.

"It isn't that—it's just that I think you're making a fool of yourself. Then there's the money involved. And even if you finish the darned ship and get to the moon, how do you know what to look for?"

I SMILED grimly. "I'm going to look for weeds."

"Weeds!" Her blue eyes sharpened.

"Like those in the laboratory," I went on slowly. "Beryl's last words to me were something about weeds. We know they came from the moon — and since the crooks went there too, it all adds up. *They went to the moon to get the weeds!* What the weeds signify, I can find out when I reach there. Understand?"

That same evening I unpacked the crates, and during the next two days—Saturday and Sunday—I worked eighteen hours apiece, welding the plates together with the laboratory's equipment, gradually getting some sort of shape into the cylindrical object in the hangar cradle.

It was not difficult. The engineers had returned the sectional plans for me to work with. Hardest part was working alone: Lucy did not raise a finger to help me.

But on that Sunday evening, when I was just about all in, Lucy came into the hangar slowly and estimated my progress. I saw her mouth tighten a little.

"Well, don't you like it?" I asked her bluntly.

"Seems I've no say in the matter!"

But nonetheless she went around the section of work I had completed, surveyed the electrical engines, then her gaze wandered to the shelves of chemicals. I thought nothing of that—then. At last she shrugged.

"At least it keeps you out of the house," she said sourly. "We're all washed up, Curt, and when we get out of this mess I'm seeing my lawyer about a divorce."

"Because I'm trying to find out who killed your father and sister, eh?" I asked bitterly. "Hell, that's gratitude for you!"

"You're not trying to solve anything!" she blazed back at me. "You are only trying to pin something on me to satisfy your infernal distrust! I never thought *you* could be such a beast!" And the venom with which she said it made me jump for a moment.

Then she was gone, leaving me scratching my head. I'm telling you, the man who sticks his head out nowadays is a sucker.

* * *

WHEN I went into the house an hour later, dog-tired, I found Lucy had gone to bed. I moodily ate the cold supper Butson had left for me, then went upstairs myself. During the day Lucy had seen fit to widen the gap between our twin beds, so that I was now several feet from her. She was sleeping deeply, or else simulating it to avoid conversation.

I got to bed in sullen fury, but I couldn't keep up the bitterness for long, for my hard work had made me like lead. I must have gone to sleep almost instantly, to be literally shot out of slumber some hours later by something damned close to pandemonium.

I awoke to the roaring and exploding of a giant gun—or so it seemed at first. Then I saw wild and wavering lights flashing through the window. I stumbled out of bed half blind and stared outside. There was no moon, but I was in time to see a monstrous vessel at the end of its journey, cushioning down to the ground on its underjets.

The rocket ship had returned!

"Lucy!" I shouted hoarsely, swinging around and slamming on the light. "Lucy, the rocket's—"

I stopped dead. Her bed was empty and her clothes had vanished. Confused, I went back to the window, stared out as I scrambled into my pants.

SUDDENLY I wondered why there was not more action from the boys around the grounds. There was only a momentary blaze of revolvers and

then a surprising silence. I frowned, cursed the fact my pants legs were twisted and were holding me up. Savagely I straightened them, grabbed my coat and dashed downstairs. I heard Butson and his wife shouting inquiry as I went.

I raced into the grounds and then brought up sharp, falling back before a sudden monstrous concussion. It hit me like an earthquake, and my dazzled eyes beheld the whole mass of the hangar laboratory going sky-high in one terrific explosion. Flat to the earth I went, my ears ringing. I got up finally to behold a devastating, crackling blaze roaring into the sky, and silhouetted against it were four figures—three men, and a girl, undoubtedly Lucy.

". . . mercury fulminate!" she was shouting. "I blew it up, I tell you! I—"

"Step on it!" one of the men shouted, and Lucy started to heave forward with them around her.

"Lucy!" I shrieked, leaping up and racing across to them. "Lucy, what's happened? What's—"

I got no further than that, for a mist shot suddenly from the air from the nearest man. Part of it missed me, but its inhalation brought me crashing to the ground, there to lie perfectly conscious but unable to move my muscles properly. It was a ghastly sensation chained there to the earth, with my nerves jumping like hell and my eyes following Lucy as she went into the darkness with the men.

Was she going deliberately—or being forced? That was what got me. She had admitted blowing up the hangar with mercury fulminate—and with it my half-made space ship. Then it was I recalled her visit to the hangar and her glance around the shelves. So she had planned to do this thing—planned it to upset my efforts!

I made a mighty effort to break the paralytic spell and failed again. Then I lay still and watched with frozen horror as, through the light of the fire, I saw monstrous antlike birds sweeping down with demoniacal speed, giant wings spread. They missed me—or else took me for dead, just as they ignored the plainclothes men scattered prone about the grounds, obviously victims of the killer's paralyzing guns.

I saw the birds settle finally at the ship's open airlock. Their wings folded like giant capes as they waddled inside the ship. Six of them went in one after the other, and came out again with their mighty beaks filled with dead leaves! No—not leaves; weeds! Limp masses of moon-weed! There was definite intelligent purpose in the way they worked.

They gathered up all the weeds they could from inside the ship—and there seemed to be a bushel of them; then they took them over and dropped them in the blaze of the laboratory fire, which was dying down into a smoldering glare.

Evidently satisfied, the birds took to the air again and swept out of sight. I did not need to guess they were following Lucy once more. That settled it for me: I had to break free! I strained and sweated and struggled, and at last felt life coming back into my limbs. I had missed the full impact, anyway.

I got to my feet at last, stumbled to the ship and stared inside it. Firelight through the portholes showed that no weeds remained, but the floor was slippery with crushed sap.

Why the systematic destruction of the weeds? I could not stop to think it out then. Right now Lucy was my sole concern.

OFF I went again, stumbling through the undergrowth of the estate, fol-

lowing the direction the birds had taken. I lost sight of them very rapidly but I went on just the same, until I found the trail ended beyond the boundaries of the estate and I was out on the river tow-path.

I did not call for fear of giving my presence away, and I'd no wish for a second shot of that paralyzing fluid. Instead I struck matches and peered at the yellow mud on the tow-path. A recollection of Lucy's stained boots on the night of Beryl's murder returned to me. Lucy had spoken the truth then.

There were clear imprints of men's boots and Lucy's shoes. Sick with anxiety for what might happen, though the lunar birds were still not in sight, I tracked the footprints until they brought me to a high bank of the river, and beyond it an old boathouse used only in the summertime. There was no sound beyond gurgling water.

I hesitated, then went down to the boathouse. Once I got to it, I froze into attention at the sound of a voice, kept pretty low but nonetheless audible.

"Whether you die or not is of no consequence to us, so get that straight, sweetheart! We can easily chuck you in the river when we're through, if you don't come across. If you're sensible you'll speak."

My skin prickled with mounting anger. Yet I had a vague relief too. Lucy was *not* associated with these mystery men, then: it had only looked that way. Probably they'd had a gun in her back to stop her calling out. Else she'd purposely kept quiet to save anything happening to me.

I crept closer, but I could not get all the conversation because of the noise the river water was making.

"... because of ants ... " I heard that clearly and puzzled over it.

"And what did we get?" the voice went on bitterly. "We got a collection of damned weeds! Sure, they'll be useful, but it wasn't what we wanted. Your father had a different secret besides weeds. He knew how to learn secrets without using radio means. We went to the moon to get it and found we'd been tricked, see? We found weeds instead.

"We tapped the wires, heard your sister telling your husband over the phone that she'd found the secret we were looking for—only when we got it from her, it proved to be the wrong secret. But *you* know the secret we want—so we came back to get it. And you'd better act quick! You know as well as we do that those damned Selenites are here on Earth to avenge the theft of their secrets. So—spill it!"

A lot of things fitted into place in my mind at hearing those words. I edged closer and suddenly caught the pale yellow of a light streaming down a cracked board. I glued my eye to it, and I got a bad shock at what I saw.

The three men were standing in the light of a candle stump—all men whom I could not recognize with their stubbly merciless faces. They looked what they were—space-traveling renegades, with the appalling strain of the void still reflected on their ugly features. In the center of them was Lucy, bound with boat rope to a rickety chair. I could see her as she struggled vainly to free herself, looking up with terrified eyes.

"WELL?" demanded the speaker savagely; and I noticed he was smoking. He waited a second or two, then blew the ash from his cigarette and eyed the glowing end thoughtfully. "You got nice eyes—" he murmured significantly.

"How can I speak when I don't know anything!" Lucy screamed frantically. "I've told you over and over! I don't

know the secret you want! I—"

For answer the speaker caught her thick hair and forced her head backward. I saw his cigarette come close.

"You asked for it," he muttered.

Realizing what he meant, I drew back my fist and drove it with blind fury into the rotten boarding. Then, just as my blow fell and sent blazing pain through my knuckles, I heard the whirring of mighty wings and the stench of reptilian flesh.

Like so many projectiles, three Selenite birds swept suddenly from the heights and slammed with terrific force clean into the roof of the place. I never saw anything like it. Armor-plated, sword-beaked, they went through like bullets.

From inside the boathouse came a desperate scream, and I distinctly saw one of the men go down with a mighty beak impaled right through his body. The candle vanished; mad commotion broke out. I made use of it and slammed my shoulder again and again into the rotten woodwork. It gave at last. I stumbled into the midst of slashing beaks and leathery wings. A pincered foreleg just missed me as I groped my way along.

I found Lucy at last, struggling to get free. My penknife finished the job; and hanging onto her tightly, I yanked her free of the mêlée, half dragged her up the bank to safety. Back to us floated the sound of men dying horribly under the onslaught of the appalling moon-birds.

"Lucy, you all right?" I gripped her tightly, anxiously.

"Yes—yes, I'm all right. Only bruises. Thank God you came when you did—"

"That secret," I broke in, as I hurried her away through the dark from the hellish spot. "What did they want?"

"I don't know," she panted. "I told them that, but they wouldn't believe it. I think that man was going to blind me with his cigarette . . . They're fiends, Curt—desperate fiends, blind to everything because the thing they wanted is still beyond them. I guess they chose the boathouse as the safest, nearest place to get to work on me."

"Guess they won't any more," I said grimly. "The birds got 'em for keeps. But Lucy, what is—"

I stopped suddenly. Reaction to the ordeal had caught up with her, and she slumped to the ground and lay motionless. I picked her up and staggered through mud and field back to the house. I was met by the recovered plainclothes men.

"What happened?" Lewis demanded. "What's been going on?"

I told him in sections as I carried Lucy into the house and up to her room. He stood scratching his head and he gazed at her limp figure.

"Can you beat it? We wait all this time for the rocket to come back, then the guys in it put us to sleep with paralyzing guns. Same way as that other guy did. What the hell was your wife doing down there at the hangar fully dressed, just when those men came?"

"I don't know and I don't care, so long as I've got her out of their clutches," I retorted. "But I've got one or two ideas to talk over with the inspector. Get him on the phone, will you—and tell him to have some men take a look at the boathouse too. The Butsons are around the house somewhere—send them up here. I've got to bring my wife around."

"Okay."

In ten minutes, with the Butsons' help, I'd made Lucy as comfortable as possible, patched up her bruises. A lit-

tle brandy accomplished the rest.

CHAPTER V

Ultrasonics

LUCY was completely conscious by the time Inspector Davison arrived. He nodded to me, then looked at her with a frown.

"What's all this?" he demanded. "My men outside said something about an attack, a fire—"

I gave him the details as quickly as I could, as Lucy lay there listening.

"How did it happen, Mrs. Fowley, that you were at the laboratory at the very moment those men landed back here?" the inspector snapped.

"Coincidence," Lucy said quietly. "I didn't plan it to happen that way, if that's what you think. I'd blown up the lab when I found they were outside. They asked me what I'd done, so I told them I'd done it with mercury fulminate. They said I'd done it to stop them examining the laboratory. Then they pushed a gun in my back and made me keep quiet."

"Why *did* you blow up the laboratory?" Davison asked. "Answer me that."

"I—I did it to save my husband from getting into danger. I know from what my father told me how space travel can drive a man to madness—and Curt was so dead set on flying to the moon, I considered it my duty to stop him by force. He wouldn't listen to reason, you see."

"These men tried to torture you into revealing a secret," the inspector went on. "What was it? Or do you mean you *do not know?*"

"I don't know," Lucy answered wearily. "I know *of* it, but nothing about it. All I know the newspapers told me—about seeing through walls. These men thought they were getting the secret from Beryl, but all they got was weeds. So they returned and tried to get it out of me."

"And the flying horrors are from the moon," Davison mused. "We can see now, from what you say, Fowley, that they are trying to destroy everybody who has stolen stuff from the moon. They destroyed these criminals because they had brought back weeds from the moon. It is possible they destroyed Dr. Coratti, too. Beryl Coratti died by a bullet, and they tried to get you, Mrs. Fowley, because you are a daughter of Dr. Coratti's."

Lucy nodded tiredly. "Guess that's right."

"Okay!" Davison perked up a bit. "You get yourself well again, Mrs. Fowley, and leave the rest to us. I'll see my men keep you safe. I've doubled the guard now."

He motioned to me as Lucy closed her eyes and relaxed. I followed him down to the library. Daylight was peeping through the clouds.

"Fowley," he said, "do you think—man to man—your wife is telling the truth?"

"I don't know," I answered him slowly. "I believe that she blew up the laboratory because she knew that if I went out into space, I would find out a secret which she is trying desperately to conceal. I don't know what it is, but we'll find it. Right now, I've one or two ideas to put forward."

"Good! We could do with some original suggestions."

"Consider this one, then. We were attacked on the grounds by somebody who used a paralyzing gun. In this later attack tonight, paralyzing guns were *again* used, but by men who had just come back from space! Doesn't that prove that they alone are not the brains behind this whole set-up?

"It is the one with the *first* gun, who has been on Earth all the time, that we've got to locate. He—or she, for it might be either—is probably the master mind."

DAVISON said, "I see your point. And from the style of the gun, it is obviously somebody scientific. But how do we start? Those men who tried to torture your wife are out of the picture—dead, mangled to mincemeat. I looked in the boathouse with my men on the way up here . . . Ghastly sight!

"The only one who still had recognizable features was Joe Calvis, I'd say, a one-time racketeer who escaped prison and was never caught. Well, I don't see how it all adds up."

"Some things add up," I said grimly. "We know that the theft of commercial secrets is somehow connected with this business—and we know Dr. Coratti had a method for getting secrets which he discovered on the moon.

"It is possible that the man who brought about Coratti's death—or the woman—obtained that secret, and so forestalled the other crooks, Joe Calvis and friends. They, tapping phone wires, thought Beryl had the secret. Maybe she had; but either way, she knew about the weeds as well, and Calvis took *that* to be the secret.

"Therefore, it is this unknown that attacked us on the first night who caused the death of Coratti. That is the person we want!"

"And you think your wife may know who this person is?" the inspector asked shrewdly.

"It's possible," I admitted. Then I went on seriously, "We are dealing with a clever scientist—so we've got to be a bit cleverer. Did it ever occur to you, Inspector, that these Selenite things resemble ants?"

"Yeah—so they do." He looked surprised. "So what? Don't we know from astronomical data that a Selenite would likely as not look like an ant, since the moon's interior is pretty much like an anthill on a large scale?"

"Exactly—and therefore, any secret of theirs would like as not be antlike in principle! I heard a reference to ants at the boathouse when those devils had my wife, and from it I gathered enough to think that ants are in this somewhere—*earthly* ants. Remember, the person who attacked me and your boys that first night was burrowing for something. Could it have been—ants?"

"Well, from what Lewis told me, the guy certainly wasn't planting radishes," Davison mused. "Guess we can settle it best by looking at the spot again. Though I don't see the connection, even now."

"We may later," I said. "We know precious little about the real capabilities of an ant. Coratti may have found something out about them. Won't hurt to investigate."

Out he went into the fast-waxing daylight to check over the spot. It had been examined before, of course, but with no particular result, since nothing special except footprints had been looked for—and those had been rubbed out. But now, as we prodded around with sticks, we unearthed a veritable anthill. Thousands of the busy little beggars were racing about in all directions on their interminable errands.

The inspector glanced at me grimly. "Guess your hunch was right, Fowley! Do you stop there, or are there more ideas?"

"You bet there are! We've got to drag our unknown enemy into the open, since we can't find out where he is. Ants are highly intelligent, as we know: in their limited sphere they possess the gift of reason, which is supposed to be

the prerogative of *homo sapiens.*"

"Skip the lecture hall and get to cases. They're intelligent. Right! So what?"

"Suppose," I said slowly, "*they* learn the secrets from inside four walls, and hand them on to the criminal?"

HE choked. "Huh? Ridiculous, man! Keep your feet on the ground, for God's sake!"

"I am, though I admit I put that rather badly. Well, I don't know *how* these ants do it, but I'm becoming damned sure that they *do!* And we can find out, too!"

"Well?" He was looking keen again.

"Can you arrange it so that the news of a very big secret meeting of industrialists is given out? Say they are to examine secret plans—say anything, as long as you bait the criminal. Broadcast it far and wide. Can you arrange it?"

"I guess so. What happens then?"

"The meeting takes place, plans are discussed, shown around, secret documents are handed out for reading—all the trimmings. The meeting doesn't actually signify anything, but it will look to the outer world like the real thing. You will be at that meeting and so will I, if you'll allow me. When we're behind locked doors, we'll see what is happening, and I'll gamble my soul that there will be ants in the room somewhere."

Davison rubbed his jaw. "Maybe—but it still sounds impossible to me."

"That's the point!" I exclaimed. "It *is* so damned clever and impossible that it has everybody fooled. Well, we're going to find out."

"And suppose there are ants? How do we get to the culprit?"

"Science again," I grinned. "Ever hear of the Sonagraf?*"

"Yeah—ultrasonic detector. We've one at the police department."

"Then you'll know it can detect sounds beyond audible range, such as the scrape of a match on a box fifty miles away, the crawling of a distant snail, the distinct rapid-fire movement of insect feet. You know that it can blanket every normal sound and detect only the ultrasonic ones beyond audible range?"

"Heck, yes!" Davison looked at me, startled. "I get it! You figure we can get the apparatus tuned to the feet of the ants—follow them and see where they take us?"

I nodded. "Right!"

"Right it is!" he cried. "I'm going back to headquarters right now and make the arrangements. I'll be back for you the moment I'm all set."

* * *

IN the two days that followed, the inspector did not communicate, but the radio gave me enough to know he was on the job. In the news bulletins, Lucy and I heard of new thefts of secrets from industrialists—and also the announcement of a special secret conference of leading industrialists, to be held with every possible "precaution." It was a masterly bait for a secret-grabbing scientist.

I could not judge Lucy's reaction to the announcement because, since her ordeal at the boathouse, she seemed listless and disinclined to discuss the matter any further. Frankly I was worried about her. She looked as though mental worry was causing her far more anguish than any physical ailment. In fact, physically she was okay again.

* Sonagraf—an instrument based on the possible outcome in 1970 of today's scientific instruments for detecting sounds beyond audible range, of which there are vast variety, particularly in the National Laboratories of Physical Research. —Ed.

I did not question her because I knew I'd get nowhere, and I arranged with Inspector Davison that he should say he wanted me for questioning again, when he finally arrived to collect me for the secret conference.

Lucy smiled faintly when I told her, said she would be safe enough with so many men on guard. So off I went.

ON the way to town the inspector gave me all the details. The conference was all set. Three ultrasonic mobile units were in plain vans outside the building, their detectors geared to the sound vibration of the world of the little.

Since every sound is different, even in ultrasonics, it was no more difficult for the crews to tune in on the distinctive noise of an ant's feet than for a radio to tune in a given station. All other sounds were wiped out by reason of their vastly different wavelengths and the insulated interior of the mobile unit vans.

Altogether, there was something rather fascinating about this excursion into the world of the diminutive . . .

The conference room was on the ground floor of one of New York's largest administration buildings. Inspector Davison had chosen a conspicuous, well-known place in order to aid the criminal master mind, and the conference was on a ground floor for the convenience of the detector vans.

At the appointed time we were all present—industrialists, the inspector, and myself. Numberless plans and official data and documents were scattered around. I urged Davison to take special note of what the plans were about, so we could recognize them again if we saw them at any time in some other place.

All doors and windows were locked, and the conference began. It signified nothing, but as it proceeded the inspector and I went about the room. Barred doors and windows mean nothing to an ant, anyway . . . Then suddenly I found something. A motionless ant was poised on the window ledge, looking at the conference table.

Davison's eyes widened unbelievingly as he gazed at it. Then he nodded, and we resumed the search. Altogether we located six of the insects, at different vantage points—overhead, on the level, at a distance. One was even between the two inkwells on the table!

The first part of our problem was solved . . .

The conference broke up thereafter, and we watched the ants gather into a body and pass through the room ventilator to the outside. In the open they were capable of detection. Down we raced to the mobile units and jumped into the first van. The engineers were tensed over their instruments, watching the detectors for direction and giving brief orders to the driver through signal phone.

So began the weirdest trip I have ever known, following scurrying ants—all six of them keeping together, fortunately—through the city in a soundproof van. Not another sound penetrated, except the distinctive *tap, tap, scrape, scrape* of the ants' busy little feet.

At times we almost lost them in the detectors; then again we caught up. The journey took us through the back streets of the city and finally out toward open country. I gave a frown as we went on. It was slow going, a crawl—but we were definitely going back toward the Coratti estate! Again I wondered if my original guess about Lucy was right. Surely *she* was not the guilty genius . . .

It was evening, a thick misty evening, when we lost the sounds com-

pletely. Our vans stopped and we all piled out into the mist and gazed around. I recognized the spot after a while. We were about a mile from the estate and half a mile from the river. In fact, we could hear it gurgling in the growing night.

"They went due north, chief—then they must have gone underground, since the sounds stopped," one of the technicians said.

"Due north? Okay, let's go!"

WE pulled out flashlights and proceeded through the clumpy grass. We spent plenty of time searching, too—probably an hour and a half, before we came across an almost covered vent that was possibly part of an old sewer system emptying into the river. But it had doors on it now—comparatively new ones, they seemed—and what was more, dried grass was glued onto them to form a perfect camouflage.

Normally, I doubt if anyone could have found the place in ten years . . .

"Locked," one of the men said, pushing against the doors.

"Wait!" I said quickly, as Inspector Davison raised his gun to fire at the locks. "Wait a minute! Douse your torch a moment. Isn't that a crack of light?"

It was—but it was only a thin fragment, where our hands had torn away parts of the false grass and the wood had warped with incessant river damp. The inspector peered inside, and a very strange spectacle we beheld.

There was a secret laboratory, not very brightly lit. The hum of a dynamo suggested the river was being used for power. But the devil of it was, we could not see our quarry even now—only the shadow! On the wall of the laboratory an indeterminate shape was busy with something, cast in shapeless silhouette.

Then suddenly everything was dark, and from an angle we could not see there sprang a beam like that from a motion picture projector—except that the beam had a distinct violet tint. Upon a screen near the wall there appeared a "still"—a slide, as it seemed—of a plan, perfectly photographed.

"It's one of those plans from the conference!" Davison breathed incredulously. "What kind of devil's witchcraft is this?"

"I'm more interested in finding out who is in there," I said slowly. "And I believe I can. Listen, Inspector, will you trust me to go back to the house?"

"To find out if it's your wife?" he asked grimly. "We can break in here and find out for ourselves, can't we?"

"We can—but this lab is full of chemicals, and I seem to recall an adventure with mercury fulminate. It could happen again. Let me go and see first, Davison. You can stay on guard here and see what else happens."

"All right. Standish, go with him for—er—protection."

I did not want the company but I was forced to have it—until I gave Standish the slip in the fog. Then I beat it back to the house. Butson was the first person I encountered.

"My wife? She here?" I demanded.

"No, Mr. Fowley. The men in the grounds have been asking where she is, too. She went up to her room after you went out today; but when I went up to tell her about dinner, I found she was absent. She must have slipped out when this fog came down. I—"

"That's all I wanted to know," I said briefly, and tore outside again.

CHAPTER VI

Selenite Vengeance

THE fog was the very devil. I found that despite my knowledge of the

district, I was soon hopelessly lost. Easy enough to get *from* the river, but the deuce of a job to get *back* to it. I must have staggered in and around the estate for about thirty minutes before I heard the noise of distant water.

I went forward actively, slipped, and went my length in sloppy mud. I got up and directed my torch downward. I was covered in mud from head to foot —yellow mud!

Yellow mud! A remembrance turned in my brain. I was still some way from the tow-path, yet the stuff was here, too, probably from winter floodings. I went on, searching the way, and presently a square, squat building loomed out of the reek. The Coratti mausoleum—at the far end of the estate.

I stopped again, hesitated, then hurriedly advanced. I hadn't been quite sure, but now my torch left no doubt about it. The bronze doors of the mausoleum were slightly open! And there were the marks of a woman's shoes—new and fresh marks—leading right to the doors. But why did none come out?

I blundered into the mausoleum's silence, flashing my light. The place was quite empty, deadly cold, and the relentless calm of the grave descended upon me. I felt I was a desecrator—but I'd gotten this far and I meant to finish it! I gazed around the walls for a moment, on the sarcophagi* of Dr. Coratti and Beryl Coratti in the center of the stone floor, side by side.

Thoughts chased through my brain; strange thoughts. Was it possible that on the night Lucy said she had been on the tow-path, she had really been *here?* Was it here whence had come the yellow mud on her boots? Again, it was because of her that we had not seen Beryl's body actually taken to the mausoleum here. Did Lucy have definite reason for wanting it that way?

I felt I was getting near to the truth at last. I cast aside all ideas on the sanctity of the dead, perched my flashlight on a stone and raised the heavy lid of Beryl's tomb. I only needed to do it for a moment. Beryl lay there, all right—silent, hands folded on her breast, as if asleep . . .

I was feeling a bit unnerved, but I went on. I remarked how much lighter Dr. Coratti's sarcophagus lid seemed than Beryl's. It moved easily and I flashed my torch inside the space—*but there was no Dr. Coratti there!* I dropped the cover back with a gasp, my brain racing at furious speed.

Suddenly I was icy calm. I felt I had the last clue in my grip. I whirled out of the sepulchral, chilly hole and floundered through mud and fog toward the river. At last I came on the group gathered about the trapdoor of the secret underground laboratory.

But the light was flooding forth now, silhouetting a single slender figure in a fur coat, standing at the door with arm upraised. It was Lucy, all right, holding something aloft.

"Take it easy, Fowley!" Inspector Davison shouted as I blundered forward. "This wife of yours has got an explosive in her hand. She threatens to blow up this whole damned laboratory, and the river with it, if we go into this hiding place!"

"I mean it too, Curt!" Lucy shouted, as I came into the fan of light. "You've gone quite far enough!"

"Why the devil didn't you catch her as she came up here?" I demanded.

"Couldn't. She came from inside the laboratory—"

"From *inside* . . . !" I stopped,

*A sarcophagus is a stone coffin, the word having cropped up quite often in the 1920's during the great excavations of Egyptian tombs by Howard Carter and others. Generally speaking, a sarcophagus is an ornamental coffin. Being an inventor and well-to-do, it is quite likely that Dr. Coratti was not content with just an ordinary coffin.—Ed.

comprehension flashing into my brain.

I SWUNG and vanished in the fog so suddenly that Lucy hardly had time to notice it. Like a madman I floundered up the bank and back again to the mausoleum. Of course! Of course! If she had come from *inside* the laboratory, there must be a secret way into it—through the mausoleum! Because the footprints outside the tomb were still fresh! And though they went *in*, they did not come *out!*

Lucy's brandishing that explosive—if it *was* an explosive—was a stall, a stall while Dr. Coratti— *Now* I saw it! And I proved it a second later, as I heard the clump of running feet in the mud from the direction of the mausoleum.

At the same moment, I heard the leathery beating of wings in the mist and the shrill unearthly cries of the Selenite monsters, which had obviously been at hand somewhere. Evidently they worked by instinct, for their sense of direction was unerring. Their cries, the mist, the running figure, now blended into some eerie nightmare chase—

"Dr. Coratti!" I yelled. *"Doctor, the game is up!"*

Coratti never had a chance to answer, for at that moment two of the unearthly birds swept into view like projectiles. I threw myself flat—and they missed me! They hurtled straight on and slammed the running, slender figure to the ground. Again and again they dived, while I went sick with horror. Then off they rushed into the mist, screaming their weird triumph.

Feet were pounding behind me in the fog now. I went blundering forward again, reached the fallen figure and turned it over. It was Dr. Coratti, all right, horribly mangled—dead. I was holding his lifeless pulse when Lucy and Inspector Davison came up in the gloom.

"She followed you—and we followed her," he said briefly. Then my wife pushed him aside and threw herself regardless in the mud at her dead father's side.

"Dad!" she screamed hysterically. *"Dad . . .* Oh, God! They got him after all. Those Selenites—Oh why, why, *why? Dad—Dad!"*

At last I dragged up her shuddering form by main strength. She buried her head on my shoulder and gave bitter convulsive sobs.

"Lucy—Lucy!" I cried. "Take a grip on yourself, child. Something like this was bound to happen."

It was minutes before she could get some coherence into her words, some calmness into her manner.

"I thought Coratti was supposed to have died long ago," Davison was saying. "How come he was running around—until now? Of course, he was the man we wanted?" he asked, glancing questioningly at me.

Lucy herself answered. "Yes . . . yes, he was the man—the scientist who was clever enough to defeat the best brains in the country. It took you, Curt, to break things up. You see what's happened—and I hope you're satisfied!" she said bitterly.

I said quietly, "Lucy, if a man insists on playing with fire, he's going to get burned."

"Dr. Coratti stole industrial secrets, and that's a crime," Davison interrupted bluntly. "And it looks as though you helped him. That makes you an accessory."

Lucy said slowly, "I know that . . . But it did not seem wrong, the way father did it. His idea was to sell different industrial secrets to different firms at high prices — firms who can well afford it. Each firm had in the past

refused to give him money to perfect his inventions. Check up and you will find each firm from which he stole secrets is one that refused him aid at some time or other . . .

"The lunar venture took practically the last of his money—he had been wealthy before, you know—and he had to have funds to further his work. So he used the moon-weeds to make him simulate death."

"How?" the inspector demanded.

"He used the weeds' sap to make a drug. He knew what it could do. After many injections—which made him especially irritable and nervous—he found he could control his heartbeat and respiration* sufficiently to simulate death. He did just that.

"FATHER had it all planned," Lucy went on. "He knew he'd be put in the sarcophagus in the mausoleum—but the sarcophagus, built right into the floor, had a spring bottom which led to the underground laboratory he'd prepared. Matter of fact, he constructed that opening long ago against such a chance as this; when he found what the moon-weeds could do, he acted.

"He thought his plan the best way to avoid the Selenites, which were after him for his probing of their secrets. He thought his scheme the best way to avoid the criminals who were trying to steal his secrets . . ."

"And you knew this all the time?" I asked her slowly.

"No! No, Curt, I didn't!" Lucy's voice was earnest. "That night when I went along the tow-path, I also went to the mausoleum here for a last look at father's tomb. But I heard noises in his sarcophagus. I found the tunnel opening at the bottom and went through it to the underground laboratory.

"Father told me everything, warned me to watch for Selenites which might strike at me. I felt it was my duty to be loyal to him, as his daughter. I believed he did the right thing: those tight-fisted industrialists deserved all they got. That was why I was away from the house so long.

"When Beryl was to be brought here, I kept you away, Curt; because I thought that when you saw the yellow mud here, you might put two and two together . . ."

"What happened tonight?" demanded Inspector Davison.

"Oh, that. I left the house in the fog and kept near the main road listening for your return. I knew that conference was a fake—it was so obvious, and I wanted to keep Dad warned if you were about. I went to the secret lab via the mausoleum, of course. But I had no explosive in my hand. That was a gag—but Curt jumped to the truth. Dad didn't escape . . . the Selenites got him first," Lucy finished bitterly.

"And Beryl?" I asked slowly.

"I can only assume she found out the double secret of the Selenite ants and the method of inducing a trance by injection of the moon-weed extract. Beryl must have come across these secret papers in Dad's laboratory safe—the one in the hangar. The data on the moon-weeds undoubtedly gave their exact location on the moon, also.

"The criminals—a tough bunch of gangsters looking for easy pickings—were anxious to get hold of Beryl or me after Dad's supposed death. From newspaper accounts, they judged that he had discovered something very valuable on the moon; just what, he of

* That is to say, Dr. Coratti so broke down the resistance of his nervous system that he was able, at will, to put himself into a cataleptic trance: a condition in which there is a sudden suspension of sensation and conscious effort. The body and limbs remain in the position they were originally when the trance took effect. Hindu fakirs are the best-known practitioners of this bodily suspension today.—Ed.

course never admitted openly."

Lucy clenched her fists. "Well, when I discovered Dad in the secret lab after his 'death,' he said Beryl found the double secret in the safe. The gangsters killed Beryl—in order to keep the information to themselves—and then stole the rocket ship for the trip to the moon."

I interrupted, "But why?"

"Because," Lucy explained, "they thought that if father placed so much value on these moon-weeds, there must be something to them. With such a drug in their hands, there's no telling to what ends the gangsters would have gone."

That made sense. "Guess they learned how to operate the rocket ship from your father's articles in scientific magazines," I mused. "They knew it was right out here, waiting for them in the hangar."

INSPECTOR DAVISON stroked his chin. "It's still not quite clear in my mind why Dr. Coratti got himself into that trance. Didn't your wife say something about that a while back, Fowley?"

"Yes. But I can understand how you would be confused. Well, Inspector, Dr. Coratti had two obsessions. He knew the Selenites would be coming after him, and he was afraid that criminals would steal his discovery. Unfortunately, he was right on both counts.

"So he thought he could get rid of both sets of enemies by pretending to die," I explained.

Lucy's eyes were tragic. "The Selenites must be a very jealous species of —of monsters. They wouldn't tolerate anyone's use of their precious moon-weed. Well, they ought to be satisfied now. Beryl murdered, Dad mutilated" —she shuddered—"and they were after me, too. And now . . ."

"They fly through space, then?" I put in quickly.

"Father said they exist in the thin air inside the moon, but they can fly in the void with equal ease. Something to do with radiations."

"We still do not know how these damned little ants read secrets!" Davison broke in.

Lucy gave a bitter smile. "It was a masterly idea, Selenite in origin. Selenites are identical to earthly ants on a big scale, and ants have a reasoning brain; therefore, they are capable of being hypnotized. On the moon, Dad learned a secret whereby hypnotic commands can be electrically enforced—in fact, Selenites rule each other that way.

"On Earth here he duplicated the system and found it possible to order earthly ants anywhere he wanted. When they returned to the laboratory here, he killed them with gas, removed their eyes, and used the eyes as transparent slides in a projector.

"Ultra-violet light shining through these 'slides' reproduced on a screen whatever the ants had seen at their destination. The previous hypnotic commands had made them keep their eyes closed going to and coming from their objective; they opened them only at the place where they had been forced to go.

"Therefore," Lucy explained, "only the things seen at the destination were imprinted on their retinas. With several ants doing this, Dad was really the owner of an inexhaustible supply of living, minute cameras."

"I've got to hand it to him—that was brilliant," the inspector said, shaking his head a little ruefully.

"Then on the night your father attacked us on the grounds, Lucy, he was digging for ants," I said. "I guessed as much."

"Right," Lucy nodded. "He'd run out of 'supplies' and remember there

was a good anthill on the estate. He took the risk, armed with a paralyzing gun. There were paralyzing guns in the rocket ship too, which the crooks must have found how to use. That explains how they had them."

"How do the things work?" Davison wanted to know.

"The gun ejects a spray which, when inhaled, clogs the brain-centers indefinitely and halts physical and mental action," Lucy told him. "That was Dad's own invention—one of many . . . And whatever you think, Curt, I *did* take sleeping tablets that night, nothing more."

"I believe you now," I smiled. "But there's one thing more—why *did* you blow up the hangar with its laboratory? What would I have found on the moon, that you were so anxious to stop me?"

"I told you the truth when I said I didn't want you to venture out into space. It would have meant your death—if the Selenites hadn't gotten you first . . . Believe me, Curt, that's the truth."

"And those Selenites may still try to get at you," I breathed.

"Perhaps . . . Unless, having got father—to them, the original thief—they are satisfied . . ."

"Anyway," said Inspector Davison, "you'd better come along with me to Headquarters and make a statement, Mrs. Fowley. You too, sir," he added. "Got to have a record, you know."

LUCY made her statement all right. But of course the law had one or two things to say, for she *had* been an accessory to a crime against the state. As an attorney, however, not wanting to be active in my own case, I secured the services of the best legal brains available. Lucy was duly tried and convicted, but with a strong recommendation of mercy by the jury, which is what we had been fighting for.

As I have already said, Lucy is a beautiful woman in any man's eyes. The judge whom she faced was no exception. He let her off with a suspended sentence.

After the trial, I sent her to the Berkshires to visit an old friend of mine and his wife. I wanted her to get away from everything, to become herself again.

In the meantime, I am clearing up the affairs of the dead Dr. Coratti, and preparing an audit of his scientific inventions, so that they will become Lucy's property when Coratti's will is probated.

It will not be long now before Lucy is back home again, in our snug little New York apartment. I will have good news for her when she arrives. Last night I drove out to the Coratti estate to arrange matters with the Butsons. As I came into the grounds there was a whir of wings overhead.

I looked up and sighted a flock of pterodactyls, heading for the full moon.

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RADIO NEWS

JUNE ISSUE NOW ON SALE

THE MONSTER OUT OF SPACE

(Concluded from page 93)

you're safe now . . ."

"Don't 'Favikins' me," the girl retorted. "I'm more right in my head than I ever was. I know ability when I see it—*now!* We were doing fine—Walter and I—until you came blundering in and upset everything with your stupid interference.

"We have inoculated this monster with some home-grown spirochetes of our own invention, and it's dying. In about an hour it'll heave up and throw us back onto the surface—where we would be right now, if *you* hadn't butted in!"

Bob Tallen could only stare at her, not knowing how to take her sudden fury.

"And let me tell you one more thing, Robert M. Tallen! I demand you return to Callisto at once, and failing that I am coming after you. Demand, indeed! And who told you that you were anybody's intended husband?"

Just then a violent temblor shook the remainder of the ship until every fixture in it rattled deafeningly. There was a succession of quick heaves, and men had to hang on to stanchions to keep their places.

"Friend Mooneater's sick," remarked Walter Berol blandly. "Stand by for a quick rise!"

THE next fifteen seconds was a tumultuous kaleidoscope. The core of the acid-eaten ship must have turned completely over five or six times before it came to rest. It was an experience such as none of the occupants ever wanted to go through again.

Then Walter Berol boldly opened the door, and they looked out onto as fantastic a landscape as ever a *troolum* * addict imagined. Everywhere huge chasms had opened and thick purplish stuff was puffing up in sickly bubbles. Antennae drooped and collapsed. The Mooneater's surface billowed like a typhoon-swept ocean. The monster was dying. A quarter of a mile away lay the *Sprite* and her two tenders, on their sides, but otherwise unhurt.

"Come, Walter," said Fava. "Now that Bob's all right, we can finish what we started."

"Right-ho!" Berol grinned, and he picked the girl up in his arms and strode away across the heaving plain.

"Look at him," muttered Bob Tallen in disgust. "Showing off his strength! Some people are just too conceited to live!"

* A *troolum* addict indulges in the chewing of the troolum weed, a Martian plant with the power to effect the brain in a delusory manner. Paradoxically, though the Martian name troolum sounds as though the drug induces "true" appearing visions, the exact opposite is the fact. Troolum visions are wild, impossible, incredibly fantastic, and yet, the victim believes implicitly in all he sees.—Ed.

"THE PERFECT" AIRPLANE WING

David R. Davis, "just a little fellow trying to get along," has profoundly affected the study of aerodynamics. This modest genius solved an aviation riddle which defied the most brilliant aeronautical minds since that event at Kitty Hawk! Don't fail to read how this "nut on aviation" combated flight's greatest enemy, air resistance, and shocked the aviation world with his "perfect" wing. You'll find this great article, MYSTERY AIRFOIL by Harold Keen, on page 36 of your P. A.

JUNE ISSUE

POPULAR AVIATION

AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

PRIZE STORY CONTEST WINNERS

In our May issue, we ran a short story, in unfinished form, titled "The Time-Wise Guy" by popular Ralph Milne Farley. We now present the names of the winners who most aptly described the actual fate of George Worthey, hero of the story.

1st. PRIZE—$25.00 CASH—Albert F. Lopez, 24 Havre Street, East Boston, Mass.

2nd. PRIZE—$10.00 CASH—R. Kelsey, 264 Eastern Prom., Portland, Maine.

3rd. PRIZE—$5.00 CASH—Robert Metze Jr., 5825 Saloma Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

4th. PRIZE—$5.00 CASH—Selden G. Thomas, The Taft School, Watertown, Conn.

5th. PRIZE—$5.00 CASH—Harold Winston, 8812 24th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Honorable Mention:

Thomas S. Gardner
Andrew Murtagh
Joe E. Cass
J. F. Keck
R. Douglas Clevh
Harold Robinson
William Herzog
Dan Wilhite
S. C. Jones
Wilbur J. Widmer
G. L. Parker
Stephen R. Kendall
Lawrence Willard
Isaac Asimov
Reginald O. Jackson
Clayton Snyder
Herbert F. Shaffer
James M. Baldwin
Robert A. Fliegel
H. Alexander
Kenneth Nahan
Jack Gerber
Betty Riblett
Phil Durkee
LeRoy Klowden
Franklin Seaboy
Kenneth Mackenzie II

P. J. Bailey
Louis Cardinal
Hy Weber
John Patch
Charles Bandy, Jr.
Robert Getman Brown
Gordon H. Brown
C. E. Forst
O. A. Hamilton, Jr.
Billy Homes
Peter Granger
Ned Paige
Joe Hubbard
Eduardo Galindo
Woodrow O. Swanson
R. H. LeBel
H. W. Howard
Sarah E. Echord
F. C. McLaughlin
Samuel R. Fairchild, Jr.
Lester Hall
William Sullivan
Earl J. Levine
Vincent Cuccio
Tommie Lou Boyd
Mrs. L. Lufkin
James Longsdorf

A. Dornstander
Albert Casper
Donald B. Miers
Charles B. Dean
William Strebel
S. Cherniack
Carl D. Goderez
Fred Newsome
Richard Holtmann
S. J. Willbanks, Jr.
Sidney Gray
W. R. Carr
Richard J. Marshall, Jr.
Wilfred L. Buck
Lawrence L. Wolf
Jonathon Loar
Philip Gordon
R. G. Bruce
Eugene Swisher
Charles W. Wolfe
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Mrs. Emil Litkee
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W. W. Foxworthy
Henry W. Martin
Russell Brady
Milton Van Sickle
Kenneth H. Quin
Harold K. Canfield
Arthur Winnike
Herman Scudder
Robert McTyre
Sol Mogelefsky
H. F. Alexander
F. A. Senour
Harry V. Schmook
Edward S. O'Keefe, Jr.
Ralph Williams
Val Vodicka
Leopold Zemsky
Paul Freehafer
Albert B. Griggs

*Editor's Note: All of the above entries were correct in varying degree, and although their letters did not win prizes, we want to give credit to a lot of clever people. Hundreds of entries failed to give the correct answer, or to even suspect the fate of George Worthey.

For the benefit of those of you who may wonder what the first prize winner had on the ball, we publish his winning letter verbatim. Mr. Lopez was the only entry to give the correct solution, define each factor of the problem at hand, *and give a possible solution to the story.* Therefore, on the basis of originality, he certainly deserves first prize. Congratulations, Mr. Lopez, and congratulations also to your co-winners.

Sirs:

When the time machine reached the zero that stood on all the dials, George Worthey was in the same position as when he had started out. He heard the professor reminding him to return one day later and then he shifted the handle one notch to the right, starting on his trip to the future for a second time. He had no recollection of his first trip because the sensation which produced those memories had not yet begun to exist and therefore the memories did not exist. In brief, George Worthey had started an eternal cycle. He goes into the future, returns to his starting point, and then starts all over again.

Two points seem to need clearing up:

1. Why didn't George see himself when he returned?

2. Why is the cycle eternal—why doesn't George return to the professor?

In answer to the first I will say that George did not see himself because the George starting out and the George returning are one and the same personality. If there were two Georges, one of them would have been created out of nothingness, which is against the laws of physics.

The second matter of the eternal cycle I will answer by saying that since it is the same George taking the trip, he will experience the same sensations and will do the same things. He will return to his exact starting point. The moment he does that, his memory of the first trip will disappear since it cannot exist before it began to occur. Thus he will start out again on the trip, not knowing that he has already made the trip. The only way that George can return to the professor is to have some unknown factor, not present on the first trip, cause him to change his plans about returning to his exact starting point. This can be done by having the professor build another time machine and try to meet George at the end of the world, millions of years in the future.

ALBERT F. LOPEZ,
24 Havre St.,
East Boston, Mass.

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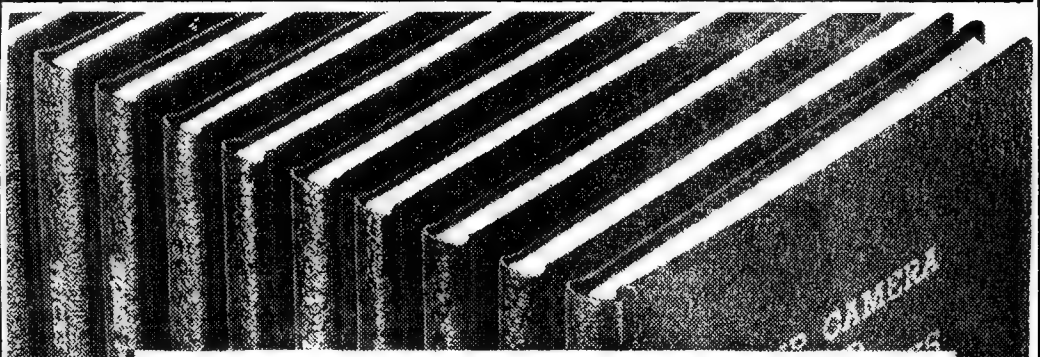

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Crane could have kicked the simple-minded swampman where it would do the most good. But he pretended surprise. "So there is," he exclaimed. "That may be the way down!" What *grim fate* awaited this strange quintet-archeologist, Venusian, Jovian, Earthgirl and her traitorous guide? Would they dare venture down beneath the terrifying ruins of Ushtu? Don't fail to read *MARTIAN TREASURE TRAP by Edmond Hamilton* . . . one of the six fascinating stories you'll thoroughly enjoy in the thrill-packed

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AMAZING STORIES

AT ALL NEWSSTANDS JUNE 10th!

Meet the Authors

ALFRED R. STEBER Author of
WHEN THE GODS MAKE WAR

I WAS born in Milwaukee, Wis., on Feb. 29, 1912, and have been a source of unutterable anguish to my creditors ever since. Feb. 29 comes only on Leap Year, so I am now only seven years old, hence do not have to live up to any contracts—being under legal age!

In high school Carl Zeidler, the new mayor of Milwaukee, sat behind me, but I won out and became the valedictorian. Incidentally, Robert Bloch, his press agent, writes me he is in the throes of a short story for AMAZING.

After high school I drifted about the country doing odd jobs and learning the facts of life. I was a big kid for my age, so I could take it. One night in 'Frisco I got pie-eyed, and woke up on a tramp ship bound for Hong Kong.

That's British territory—unless the Japs have taken it over as this goes to press—so the boys stuck me in the hoosegow for not having a passport. When they dragged me out again to be deported, I escaped from a couple of tough guards and beat it back to my ship.

When we docked at Shanghai, I lit out for good and beat my way up to Manchuria, which at the time was in the hands of Marshal Chang Tso-lin. I got there in May, 1928, and joined his bodyguard as a sort of assistant major-domo.

This was in Peking. Everything was delovely, and I was beginning to have visions of an ambassadorship to Turkey, where they had swell harems, when Chang's armies met reverses, and he himself left for Mukden on June 3.

So somebody blew the train up—the Japs, it is believed—and I was out of a job!

At that time, China and the Soviet Union were as thick as two thieves; so when I finally bummed my way down to Nanking, I got myself put on the payroll as a secret agent and forthwith set out for Moscow after being flown to Harbin, Manchuria, to check up on the amount of coöperation the Stalin gang was really offering.

I got to Moscow in August, it was hot as blazes, and what with vodka and the heat, I said to hell with this spy business!

So I found myself an honest job with the Government printing house as a combination "expert" on American propaganda and general stooge. I did so well that I was transferred to the espionage service, of all things, and sent to Berlin.

This was in July, 1929. At that time the Nazis were just feeling their oats, and the Russians wanted to find out how come. I reported back that the German democracy was doomed to collapse because of poor leadership. Being a realist, I don't think Stalin ever took the German republic seriously after that.

Anyway, I got disgusted with the whole business, and cleared out in Sept., 1932. Don't ask me how I got back to this country—I don't remember any too well myself, what with the scotch and the general confusion.

So that was a very terrible time to land back on one's native shores. In fact, both the country and I were broke when I landed in New York. The Travelers' Aid Society helped me get back to Milwaukee, but they were just as broke there as everybody else.

Anyway, on the strength of my European experience, I got a job with Democratic city headquarters as a publicity man to explain Roosevelt's foreign policy to the voters. That was like predicting the direction the weather vane will point to at a given hour, and I was just about nuts when the election was over. My job was over, too.

But I had a couple hundred bucks from the job saved up. I bought myself an old Model T, stocked it with groceries, and set out to see what the depression was doing to the land.

I'd stop off in small towns and tell the local editor: "Mr. Zilch, I have just come from Cuyahoga County. Conditions out there are very interesting. I interviewed dirt farmers, storekeepers, house wives and the farmer's daughter. Want a story about it?"

So like as not he'd say "yes," and I picked up enough kale that way to keep going. But after a while I got tired of this crazy existence, so one night in a hobo's camp I drew my portable typemill up before the fire and started to pound out a story. I called it "The Saga of an Educated Hobo," a kind of crime yarn mixed with adventure, and it sold to a New York pulp house at special depression rates—½ cent a word, after I'd written for my check three times and threatened to sic the F. B. I. on 'em.

That started me off on my life of indolence and fishing. Batting out pulp stories—all kinds of 'em, from confession to crime—I made enough dough to buy some real snazy fishin' tackle and a new jalopy, a '29 Nash, only four years old.

Well, that was back in 1933, in November. I went down to Florida that year and took it easy on the beach. In between times I played the ponies and celebrated the repeal of Prohibition.

So that's what I've been doing ever since—celebrating. With quite an armful of yarns sold to the pulp houses. Julius Schwartz, the New York agent, got me interested in science fiction, and he's been on my neck ever since.

Hope I don't ever boil over!—*Alfred R. Steber.*

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

This department will be conducted each month as a source of information for our readers. Address your letters to Question and Answer Department, AMAZING STORIES, 608 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

Q. Can sun spots cause electrical disturbances? —William Knight, Kansas City, Mo.

A. Only recently we had a severe electrical storm which interfered seriously with telephone, telegraph, and radio communications. The storm was so severe that 90 to 95 per cent of the telephone circuits in Wisconsin and Minnesota were put out of service. Experts seeking an explanation of the mysterious phenomena, called upon astronomers for an answer to their problem. Several eastern astronomers agreed that the probable cause was a solar cyclone which created a gigantic sun spot, many times larger than the earth. William Barton, director of the Hayden Planetarium in New York, claimed that the solar storm sent a bombardment of electrical charges to the earth, and these in turn came into conflict with the normal direction of the earth's own electric or magnetic currents. Result: confusion of electrical communications.

* * *

Q. Could mercury be considered a war material?—J. R. Wright, Chicago, Illinois.

A. We should say so! Fulminate of mercury, a gray, sandy substance, is the "starter" used for basic explosives. The fulminate explodes through heat or percussion and no efficient substitute has ever been discovered. The next time you examine a bullet, notice the small button-like cap which the hammer of the gun strikes. This button is really a small capsule containing fulminate of mercury. It explodes violently when struck by the hammer and in turn sets off the powder contained in the cartridge.

The greater part of the world's supply of mercury is mined in Spain. The United States, Mexico, and Japan are also big producers. Recently plans were announced for the reopening of the New Almaden mercury mine in California as a result of new war demands for the metal. This California mine started producing in 1846 and its operations were discontinued 14 years ago when other countries produced the metal cheaper. Before the war mercury sold for $75 a flask (76 pounds), today it is selling around $185 a flask, more than double the price a few years ago!

* * *

Q. Which is the best weapon, the torpedo or the big gun?—Timothy Allen, Boston, Mass.

A. The answer to your question depends entirely upon the circumstances under which these instruments of war are used. Large 16 inch battleship guns can shoot a shell for fifty miles or so. These guns are capable of very accurate shooting at ranges of nine or ten miles and the shell travels 3,000 feet per second. The torpedo can, at best, hit a ship a mile or two away. It travels at about forty miles per hour and costs around $10,000 per shot against $500 for a big gun. However, the torpedo contains more explosive and on hitting will do more damage than a shell. In addition a torpedo hits below the water line where it can reach the vital parts of a ship. It is safe to say that for distances of less than seven hundred yards, a torpedo is the best weapon; at greater distances the gun would prove preferable.

* * *

Q. My friend and I had an argument. I claimed that there was such a thing as a bird-eating spider and he said there wasn't. Which one of us was right?—Fred Thompson, Minneapolis, Minn.

A. You are right, Fred. A terrible hairy spider over half-a-foot in diameter was discovered by a chap named "Amazon" Bates. This spider is known to eat birds and is often seen crawling along the walls of buildings located in the tropics of Brazil. The horrible monster spins a heavy web which can trap and hold small birds, snakes, and mice. The beast is covered with coarse gray and reddish hairs and natives make sport of shooting them with .22 calibre pistols.

* * *

Q. What is static?—Crandall Phillips, New Orleans, La.

A. Static is a natural atmospheric disturbance created by stray electrical currents in the atmosphere. It is the crackling sound you hear in your radio. There are two forms of static: one, that caused by natural elements such as storms and solar disturbances; and, two, that caused by man-made instruments such as electric signs, elevators, loose electrical connections, and x-ray tubes. As a rule static is more prevalent during the day than at night. It is interesting to note that Major Armstrong's new frequency modulation system has practically eliminated all static troubles. It is just a question of time before all sets will be replaced by "F-M" receivers.

Science Quiz

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific and pseudo-scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you rate 50% correct in your answers, you are considerably ahead of the average. Give yourself 4 points for each correct answer.

TRUE AND FALSE

1. Strong odors affect the electrical conductivity of air and may be recorded. True..... False .....

2. Ultra-violet waves are used in the making of modern sound motion pictures. True..... False.....

3. Human beings can survive longer without water if they abstain from food. True..... False.....

4. The "Keeler Polygraph" or lie detector, flashes a red signal when the subject makes a false statement. True..... False.....

5. Phobos is the name for the outer satellite of Mars, Deimos for the inner. True..... False.....

6. The average human being exhales three pounds of carbon dioxide gas per day. True..... False.....

7. At 20,000 feet above sea level the atmospheric pressure is reduced one fourth. True..... False.....

8. Dogs are color blind. True..... False .....

9. The speed of sound is reduced by about one per cent for each degree fall in temperature. True..... False.....

10. Comets are believed to be composed of swarms of meteoric particles kept together by their own gravitational attraction. True..... False.....

WRONG NUMBER

Eliminate the words that do not correspond, in each group of three.

1. Plumbago, Diamond, Opal
   Dendrite, Axon, Fibrogen
   Omnigraph, Telegraph, Embryo
2. Stomach, Pectin, Gastric
   Bile, Haemoglobin, Blood
   Quantum, Helium, Light
3. Pectin, Fruit Genes
   Cold, Coryza, Cilia
   Frond, Humus, Fern
4. Radium, Lead, Silicon
   Carbon, Diamond Silicon
   Vitriol Nitric, Sulfuric
5. Stannic, Tin, Lead
   Wolfgang, Sulfur, Tungsten
   Oxygen, Ozone, Ohm
6. Carbon Monoxide Gasoline, Gypsum
   Gamete, Latex, Ovum
   Embryo, Gamete, Neuron
7. Axon, Nerve, Calyx
   Anther Pollen, Palmitin
   Sucrose, Cotton, Cane Sugar
8. Laughing Gas, Nitric Oxide, Nitrous Oxide
   Chlorine, Haber process, Nitrogen
   Antimony, Lead, Stibnium
9. Gold, Azurite, Aurum
   Cellulose, Cotton, Iron
   Sodium, Natrium, Nitrogen
10. Silicon, Glass, Cellophane
    Cellulose, Cotton, Iron
    Cuprous, Copper, Cordite

MATCH THESE GASES

Poison Gases	Effects and Symptoms
1. Mustard Gas (Di-chloroethyl)	A—Twenty-three different varieties used in the World War. Intended to produce temporary disability and confusion.
2. Lewisite (Chloro-vinyldi-chloro-arsine	B—Two and a half times the weight of air. Fills shell holes and dugouts. Greatest action occurs in the presence of moisture. Causes choking, coughing and suffocation.
3. Phosgene	C—Peculiar odor. Evaporates slowly at ordinary temperatures. Very penetrating. Goes through ordinary clothing, rubber and even leather. Especially damaging to eye's cornea.
4. Crying Gas	D—Has ability to penetrate the skin. Three drops, placed on a rat's abdomen, causes death in two or three hours. It is a violent respiratory irritant. Produces terrible sneezing spells.
5. Chlorine Gas	E—Fills shell holes and dugouts. Has a delayed action. First symptoms very minor. Its effectiveness mainly due to its initial innocuous character. Its menace is revealed only after considerable gassing has occurred.

(Answers on page 142)

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brick-bats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

CHURCHWARD'S BOOK?

Sirs:

I am interested in Time and its phases; especially theories concerning Time. Space travel and rocket stories are my second choice. I enjoyed especially Willy Ley's articles on rockets. See if you can get him to write more articles of this type. I also favor a "Rocket Club" for the furtherance and development of rockets. Also stories about the lost continent Atlantis and Lemuria. Send my thanks to Henry Gade for his article which I shall save for my scientific scrapbook, and H. R. Hammond for his magnificent drawing. I have tried to obtain William Churchward's book, but can't seem to be able to get it. Perhaps you could supply me with some information as to where I might find it, or some other book on the same subject.

JOSEPH CATALAN,
2355 Valentine Ave.,
Bronx, N. Y.

Two of Churchward's books are: "The Children of Mu" and "The Symbols of Mu." Either one will give a comprehensive story of Lemurian findings.—Ed.

MORE ABOUT THE CONVENTION

Sirs:

I know it would be unreasonable to ask you, the editor, to print a letter concerning the coming S-F Convention, each issue in "Discussions," so I'd like to tell those readers of AMAZING who are interested in learning all the latest developments in the *Chicago 1940 World Science Fiction Convention,* to be staged in Chicago over the Labor Day holiday, Sept. 1st-2nd, how to keep informed on the *"Chicon,"* as well as on all the news and activities of that very active group of "Midwest fans."

MIDWEST NEWS & VIEWS, an amateur publication which is issued bi-weekly in a neat, mimeographed format, is the means of getting all the inside dope on the Convention and news of the current fan doings. Inasmuch as ventures such as these are *not* intended for financial profit, but rather to serve the fan field, the cost of a subscription is 5 cents per copy, three issues for 10 cents.

I invite readers of AMAZING STORIES and particularly those who are planning to attend the Chicago S-F Convention, to take advantage of this reliable news service.

MARK REINSBERG,
Editor: MIDWEST NEWS & VIEWS, and Chairman of the Convention Committee,
3156 Cambridge Ave.,
Chicago, Illinois.

STORY OPINION

Sirs:

My opinion of the stories in the May issue is as follows:

The Time-Wise Guy—It might bring in some good endings, but who cares anyway—besides the Editor?

Giants Out of the Sun—Passable—but DON'T tell us it was based on the actual happenings of a real close friend of your grocer's wife's bridge partner's husband's youngest clerk's uncle, and that you got the story ALMOST direct so you swallowed it hook, line, and sinker. Just another poor fish!

Adam Link, Robot Detective — Excellent, extraordinary, perfect. More of Adam and Eve, please.

Liline, the Moon Girl—Good, as far as this type of story goes. (As far as they usually go is the wastebasket.)

Hok Draws the Bow—Excellent, notwithstanding mistakes. Good old Hok. How can Manly Wade Wellman say that he considers Hok as his ancestor? Once published, he's ours too.

John Brown's Body—Begorra, I knew we'd have to wait 'til an Irishman or two wrote a story for a couple dozen belly-laughs. (Just between you and I, I am in bed now with the flu, and when Mother heard me laughing at John Brown's sales tactics, she thought I had developed Whooping Cough too.)

The covers this month seemed very childish interpretations of the scenes they portray. Can't you do better?

JOHN ANDERSEN,
South Fort George,
British Columbia,
Canada.

What about the cover on this issue? It was painted specially by Robert Fuqua to give the science readers a chance to have their innings. Personally, we think you'll like it. And we think

you'll like Steber's story about that cover too. And the amazing character on which it is based.—Ed.

SCIENCE FICTION MOVIE CLUB

Sirs:

I must congratulate you on the improvement that AMAZING STORIES has made in the past year. When you first took over the magazine, I was very disappointed, for I never have liked sensationalism in stories, and your first few issues contained nothing but that type of story. I enjoy an exciting tale, but not one that is too highly implausible. In other words, I like a little factual basis for my stories.

I might make one exception to that statement, for I think the "Adam Link" stories are the most human and interesting that it has been my pleasure to read in many a moon. My reason for including this series in the group of implausible stories, is that I do not think that practical robots will ever be human in form. Our body is much too inflexible to be used as a pattern for an automatic thinking machine. However, that's just my opinion, Anyway, here's to Adam Link; long may he live!

And now a brickbat. Do you *have* to make your covers *quite* so gaudy? That last cover was enough to give people nightmares. What happened to the photographic covers? I thought they were really great. Your inside illustrations are O.K.

How about a little more s-f humor? I enjoy what few cartoons and short stories you do have, but give us a few more, won't you?

Incidentally, I am trying to form a Science Fiction Movie Club. The purpose will be to write scripts and photograph complete Scientifiction stories with our own motion-picture camera, these completed films being available for showings to other science-fiction clubs. If I can get enough interested in time, I would like to take motion pictures of the coming Science-Fiction Convention in Chicago. So if any of your readers are interested, have them get in touch with me as soon as possible.

Sincerely,
WALTER F. WILLIAMS, Apt. B-3,
333 Ovington Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

The only trouble with photographic covers is the problem of getting them of a science fiction nature. It would be a tremendous job to build props, for instance, to photograph this month's cover. Not that we wouldn't give our right arm to present a scene like this in an actual photo. Would that *be something!*

Yes, we'll have more cartoons, and more short humor stories. "The Ray of Hypnosis" in this issue is an example of that.—Ed.

HERE'S SOME LEMURIA DATA!

Sirs:

In his compiling for the article "12000 Years Ago," Mr. Gade apparently read Plato very care-

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29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
6.00-16	3.75	1.45

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34x7	$10.95	$4.65
38x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95
7.50-20	$6.95	$3.75
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fully and Churchward somewhat hastily. He apparently entirely overlooked Plutarch: Life of Solon De Facie in Orbe Lunae. Aristotle: De Mirabile Auscultatio; Diodorus Siculus; Theopompus of Quio; The Midrashim, as translated by Rabbi Ginsberg; Proclus, the Neo Platonian. Augustus Le Plongeon: Sacred Mysteries, Queen Moo and the Sphinx; Abbe Brasseur. When all of the existing texts have been correlated, the following chronology seems to be reasonably established: First catastrophes, the raising of the mountains, between 13,000 and 12,000 B.C., i.e. fourteen or fifteen thousand years ago. Destruction of Mu, definitely placed a few years on either side of 11,000 B.C. Beginning of the destruction of Atlantis, when the ancient capital fell, definitely set by the Dresden Codex and the Troano mss. at 8000 B.C. As noted by Mr. Gade this was a not a once-for-all destruction. Some habitable land endured for millenia. If Welsh legend is to be believed, some now-vanished islands survived until around 400 A.D. or later.

The location of Atlantis is also rather definitely placed. Originally one continent, it extended from Lat. 10 N. up to Greenland. The Azores were on its eastern border, and its western shore lay only a few hundred miles from North America. The first catastrophe split it into seven islands, later increased to ten. (Note: the Sargasso Sea is *not* a marsh. It is a collection of seaweed in a huge, calm eddy, formed by ocean currents; and it is deep water.)

Undoubtedly there were remnants of Atlantis still above water in the days of Carthage; but the wars to which Plato refers were with the Mayas. And Plato is borne out by inscriptions at Chichen-Itza and Uxmal.

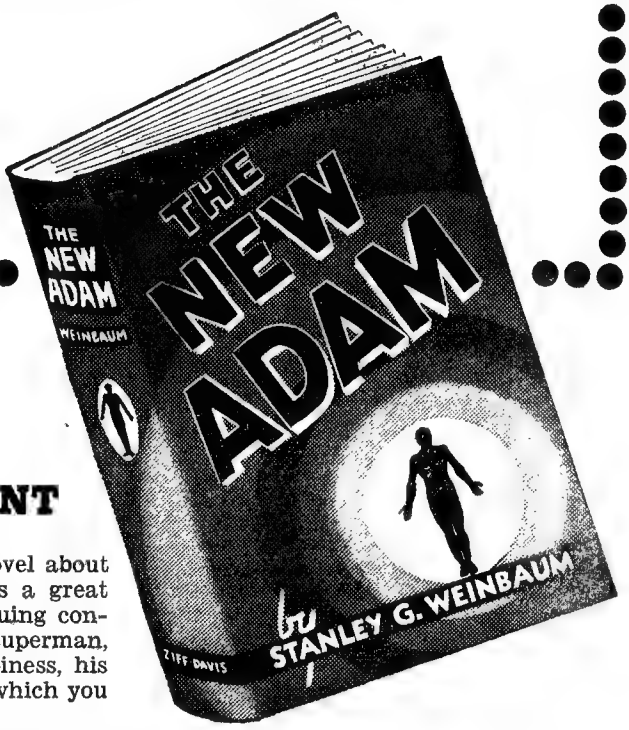
"Maya" is the Naacal (sacred language which seems to have originated in Mu) for "Colonist." To describe accurately a citizen of Yucatan, he must be called a Cara-Maya, or Carib-Maya for short. In Yucatan they retained the Maya part. In Guatemala, the Carib as a race name. Similarly, there are traces of "Mayas" in Burma and Malaysia, but these are "Naga-Mayas" or Nagas, originally "Naacal-Mayas."

Also, there are evidences in South America which distinctly "can be said to be anywhere near 12,000 years old." To wit, the stone-lined ship canal in Bolivia, long stretches of which still survive, though it is now miles from any water and *9000 feet above the sea.* Or the Temple of the Sun, plainly visible below the waters of Titicaca. These two were obviously there before the mountains rose. One of Churchward's tablets locates the canal, and incidentally the City of Manaos, *by that name,* by a star-group roughly dating it seventy thousand years ago. This is no proof,—but if any of the tablets and glyphs are accepted, why balk on that one?

One other ambiguity—the ceiling of the Lemurian airships is given as 600 feet. This is a modern interpretation based on modern aircraft. According to accounts—the best one is in the Sanskrit "Ramayana,"—they could not rise more than

(Continued on page 138)

A MASTERPIECE OF SCIENTIFIC FANTASY



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(Continued from page 136)

around 600 feet *above the earth;* but they were not limited by height above sea level. They could have gone over the crest of Everest, clearing it by their full ceiling, for they are purported to have obtained their motive power from earth-currents. At greater altitude than 600, the pickup of these currents was too weak to drag the ship. Their ascending qualities were probably plain L.T.A.—the gondola built into the lower part of the hull, the upper part being gas cells. This also explains their inability to fly over water—no magnetic earth-lines for them to follow. To change course, they free-ballooned in the wind until they reached the contrary current to pull them.

I might go on *ad infinitum;* but this is long enough for one letter.

KENT CASEY,
2618 Marengo St.,
New Orleans, La.

Many thanks for your interesting additions and explanations on Mr. Gade's article. Our readers will be much interested in comparing your notes with his. And you mention a good deal that was not covered by Mr. Gade, which we are pleased to pass on.—Ed.

BEST IN SIX MONTHS

Sirs:

"Black World" is the best story AMAZING STORIES has published in six months. The science, both factual and speculative, is accurate and realistic. The plot is worked out, so far as the first part goes, with as much care as the interplanetary background. Finally, the people are real and human, and the characterization excellent.

A few words on the rest of the magazine. The issue as a whole appeals to me as the best recent number of AMAZING STORIES. "Black World" is partly responsible for this, but the stories which I rate 2, 3, and 4, namely: "Terror Out of the Past," "The Scientific Pioneer," and "The Strange Voyage of Dr. Penwing," are all very good.

D. B. THOMPSON,
3136 Q St.,
Lincoln, Nebr.

How did you like our interplanetary issue, last month? We were persuaded to try this due to the great success of "Black World."—Ed.

A QUESTION

Sirs:

I sincerely hope you will print this letter in your Discussions Column in the next issue of AMAZING STORIES because I have a question which has been bothering me for weeks, and, frankly, it sure has me puzzled. When I asked my physics teacher about it, he thought it over and said: "Well, I guess you've got me on that one!"

Newton's law of universal gravitation states that "the attraction between two bodies is directly proportional to each of their masses, and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them."

As everyone knows from this statement, if I

(Continued on page 140)

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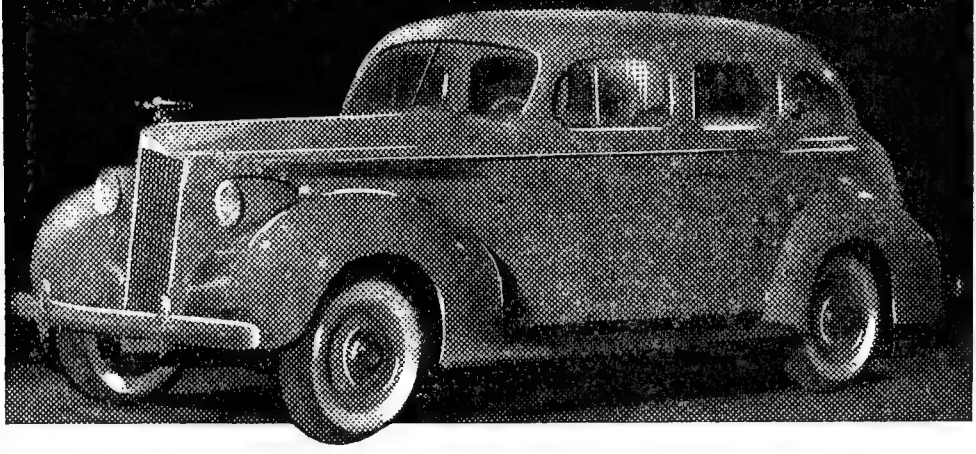

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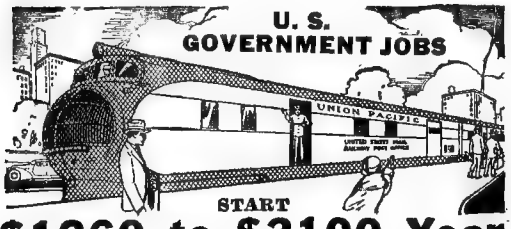

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(Continued from page 138)

went 2 units away from the earth (4,000 miles—1 unit) I would weigh 1/4 as much. If I went 3 units away, I would weigh 1/9 as much. And if I went half-way into the center of the earth, I would weigh 4 times as much.

Now my question is this: As I went nearer and nearer to the core of the earth, would I become heavier and heavier to an infinite amount, and then, reaching the center, would I automatically weigh zero? If I stepped 10 feet from the center, would I weigh an infinite amount, and then if I stepped to the center, would my weight be zero?

Come on all you scientifiction fans, write to the Editor and submit your theories. I'm exceedingly anxious to get the answer to this question.

FREDERICK WEINER,
c/o Ambassador Apts.,
14 Buswell St.,
Boston, Mass.

That's right, you amateur scientists, how about giving Mr. Weiner the answer to his question? We'll publish the best one.—Ed.

HORN'S STORY TRUE?

Sirs:

My attention was attracted by "Giants Out of the Sun" by Peter Horn, *not* for its literary value, for it has none; *not* for its plot, for stories of giants are not unique; and *not* for its fantasy, for you have published stories far more fantastic than this, but for its immediate connection and bearing with the world of today.

It seems to me that a story dealing on a subject of vital importance to humanity should be either proved or disproved, at least an airplane might be sent out to ascertain whether the mists mentioned do exist. If the existence of these mists is substantiated, they should most certainly be examined at first hand. (Then again, this mysterious "Mr. X" should be examined for signs of insanity.)

However, could a protoplasmic giant 100 feet tall support his own weight to such an extent as to be able to run nimbly around and fight when a man only 8 feet in height needs a cane or a comparatively small *steel* girder bends when supported by one end above ground? Could an *isolated* and unknown people who were, not long ago, far inferior to us scientifically advance so tremendously as to be able to construct an infernal machine, about whose basic principles modern science has no inkling, that is capable of destroying the entire human race? Then, too, the populace as described seemed, as a whole, much too ignorant and superstitious to be a part of such an intelligent race.

JAMES W. DONALD,
Box 456,
Honolulu, T. H.

Yours is not the only letter we have received in regard to the truth of this story, and indeed, we can't refute its truth at all. There have been many stories lately of strange things going on in

(Concluded on page 142)

SABOTAGE ON MARS

SCIENTIST WALTERS banged directions at me as I stood before the mammoth switchboard. I pulled levers, twisted knobs and read meters to him. All around us in the laboratory the transformers and tubes came to life. Walters looked up at me. "My life's work is in your hands now. Go up in the dome, aim the telescope at what you want and pull that lever you saw me use this morning . . . and by God, Pfaffinger, I—I'm praying for you!"

I took the steel stairs up to the dome at full tilt . . . sprang to the telescope and swung it along the shadowy desert horizon. Below, in the lab, I heard the doors splinter sickeningly and give. Then through the telescope I caught sight of what I was looking for. . . ! Things happened fast! Suddenly there was a great alien crash of sound down on the lab floor . . . I reached the railing just in time to see. . . !!

My God, what did I aim the telescope at? Did I pull the right lever on the transporter? How can I prevent Marcia Koch and her band of saboteurs from killing Walters and his daughter? How can I stop this female demon from using Walters' great invention? Will Mars be at the mercy of Fascist troops from Europe . . . will my land be captured? Turn to page 70 and find out! Don't miss this exciting story by MAURICE DUCLOS . . . one of the 8 great tales you'll thoroughly enjoy in the

JUNE ISSUE

7 OTHER GREAT STORIES—including:

★ **DR. DESTINY, MASTER OF THE DEAD—by Robert Moore Williams.** What was the grim purpose behind the mysterious disappearances of the unfortunates of New York?

★ **TROUBLE IN AVALON—by Russell Storm.** Sgt. Buttle went out into No Man's Land and found there were ghostly knights on the battlefield!

★ **THE REFLECTION THAT LIVED—by Ross Rocklynne.** Prof. Braun found a way to bring the end of the universe into his laboratory . . . and then faced death!

★ **THE WORLD IN THE ATOM—by Ed Earl Repp.** Gary Horne exploded a Thorium atom and hurled himself into incredible adventure in a sub-world!

★ **THE GENIUS OF LANCELOT BIGGS—by Nelson S. Bond.** A cargo of contraband arms, a mind-reading spy, and Lancelot Biggs . . . what a combination that makes!

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(Continued from page 140)

the Peruvian interior, and in spite of the fact that some of Mr. Horn's findings are fictionally embellished, we are compelled to admit that right at the moment, they may not be as fantastic as the actual truth. However, we can say this. The story we presented may or may not be pure fiction. It is based *on fact.*

As far as a giant being able to support his own weight, why not? An elephant has no difficulty in moving about, and swiftly, too, take it from Osa Johnson!

(Concluded on page 145)

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Chester Hoey, 24 yrs., 301, 6th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., whose hobbies are science, sports, bike riding and one-man Abe Lyman band, invites those with problems to confide in him and he will help. . . . Charles Ruffing, 436 W. Glenaven Ave., Youngstown, Ohio, wants correspondents interested in stamp collecting, photography and amateur journalism. . . . Ernest L. Brown, 215 N. St. Louis Blvd., South Bend, Ind., would like to contact SF fans in his locality who are interested in forming a SF club. . . . James E. Richardson, 833 Park Ave., Vineland, N. J., will exchange picture view post cards with pen pals of any age. . . . Bob Muldoon, 1113 Glencairn Ave., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, who is 14 yrs. will answer all letters from pen pals, either sex; any subject and will trade postcards. . . . R. J. Moran, Box 137, S. Connellsville, Pa., wishes to sell back issues of AMAZING STORIES and other SF magazines to SF fans; 10c each, in good condition with covers intact. . . . William J. Maconlier, 709 E. Venango St., Philadelphia, Pa., would like correspondents interested in science, chemistry, Spanish music (classics and Spanish), or anything that offers a problem. . . . Frank Hinckley, 22 yrs., Box 53, Lomita, Calif., is an expert ice-skater and desires pen pals. . . . Franklin James, 2302 Cakes, Everett, Washington, has for sale AMAZING STORIES' Annual, Quarterlies, etc. . . . Frank S. Cook, 184 Dowling Ave., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, is desirous of correspondents anywhere, but particularly Australia and New Zealand; interested in ornithology. . . . Byron Kelham, Rt. 9, Box 438, Portland, Ore., would like pen pals under 15 yrs. of age. . . . Andrew Serediak, Kahwin, Alberta, Canada, would like to correspond with either sex, on any subject, from the U.S.A. and Canada. . . . Anthony Landry, 3744 Lakeshore Drive, Port Arthur, Texas, would like pen pals from Spain and South America, between ages of 13 and 15. . . . John Cunningham, 2050 Gilbert Street, Beaumont, Texas, desires correspondents of either sex between ages of 12 and 18. . . . L/cp Burns Squad, No/2617901, Rct: Evans, 13th Company, Grenadier Guards, Chelsea Barracks, London. S.W.1., England, is anxiously desirous of SF magazines and pen pals of either sex.

J. L. Chapman, 1521 Como Ave., S.E., Minneapolis, Minn., has for sale AS and other SF magazines, annual sets or singles from 1933 to date; all are in perfect condition, cheap. . . . Broox Sledge, 214 Glade, New Albany, Miss., wants back issues of AS 1937 to March 1939. . . . George E. Stewart, 708 E. Cervantes St., Pensacola, Fla., wants to correspond with other students of Esperanto both in U.S. and foreign countries. . . . Abraham Oshinsky is forming an astronomy club in New York City and wants to hear from those interested. . . . L. Lee, 2011 Spencer St., Philadelphia, Pa., will trade unused U.S. stamps and SF magazines 1926 to 1937 for copies of fan magazines, pamphlets, books, drawing, etc. . . . J. S. Avery, 55 Middle St., Skowhegan, Me., wants to hear from those interested in joining the Maine Scientifiction Association. . . . Mrs. Howard Beasley, Lyndon, Kan., wants to correspond with any and all fantasy and SF fans.

QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 133)

TRUE AND FALSE

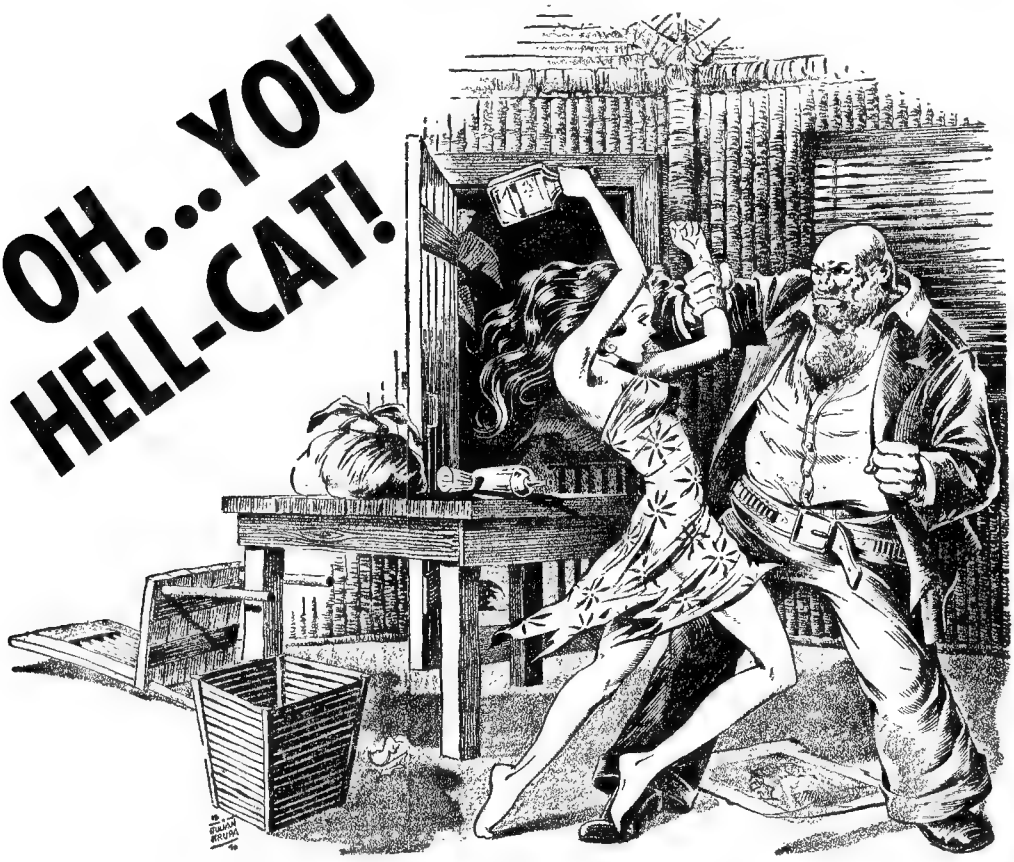
1. False. 2. True. 3. True. 4. False. 5. False. (It's the other way around.) 6. True. 7. False. (One half would be nearer correct.) 8. True. 9. True. 10. True.

WRONG NUMBER

1. Opal Fibrogen, Embryo
2. Pectin, Bile, Helium
3. Genes, Cilia, Humus
4. Silicon, Silicon, Nitric
5. Lead, Sulfur, Ohm
6. Gypsum, Latex, Neuron
7. Calyx, Palmitin, Cotton
8. Nitric Oxide, Chlorine, Lead
9. Azurite, Iron, Nitrogen
10. Cellophane, Iron, Cordite

MATCH THESE GASES

1-C, 2-D, 3-E, 4-A, 5-B.



"The hard-to-get-type, huh?" Bully Mahan grunted. With his huge arms spread like nippers of a giant crab, he came forward, slowly herding beautiful Luana back to a corner. Her breath came fast as her voluptuous breasts swayed in a rhythmical motion under her close-fitting *pareau.* Bully slid his eyes upward from the native girl's trim ankles to her smooth bronzed thighs . . . then suddenly hurled himself in a headlong lunge at the girl, and had her! As Bully Mahan grasped her firmly in his arms, Luana struck something in the thug's hip pocket . . . her fingers telling her immediately that it was a flask. As Bully laughed and raised his head triumphantly over his prized conquest, Luana had the flask out and was swinging it with all the vigor her beautiful, firmly-muscled body could muster! "You hell-cat!" the half-unconscious monster groaned. "Oh . . . you hell-cat! I'll get you!" Here's an excitin g, fast moving story of the South Seas, brimming with thrilling adventure, romance and action! Don't fail to read *THE BUM WHO REFORMED* by William O'Sullivan . . . turn to page 56 of your June South Seas Stories!

6 Thrilling STORIES

★ **REVOLT ON HALF-MOON ISLAND—by Henry Kuttner.** "I'll do it," said Morgan, "drive her off the island!" But that was before he saw Janna Garth!

★ **PARADISE—NO ANGELS WANTED—by David Wright O'Brien.** Steve Trent had a hard and fast rule on his island paradise . . . that rule was: no angels wanted!

★ **HAVOC ON HANUA—by Alexander Blade.** He was a perfect sissy and there was no place for him on Hanua . . . or so thought the pineapple king!

★ **LOST ISLAND—by George E. Magee.** Curt Stone was searching for an island Eden . . . and he found it . . . but it turned into hell overnight!

★ **PEARLS—FOR A PRICE—by William P. McGivern.** Thirteen perfect pearls . . . but drunken Mike Denton couldn't know the price fate had placed on them!

Big JUNE Issue

South Sea STORIES

NOW ON SALE At All Newsstands

AS MARS SEES US

By HENRY GADE

How would the Martian imagine the Earthman? What would his scientific reconstruction of us be, deduced from his knowledge of Earth?

(See back cover painting by Frank R. Paul)

A MARTIAN scientist, being asked to give his opinion of what an Earthman would be like, what his environment would be, and what his habits and civilization might be, would most logically arrive at conclusions such as these:

Astronomically, his observations of Earth would reveal that the planet has a heavy atmospheric blanket; that it possesses a predominance of water-covered area; that it has a vast, warm tropic belt where vegetation is luxuriant; that it has much rainfall; and that it has a twenty-four-hour rotation period on its axis.

Spectrographically, he would find that the planet is rich in minerals; has an atmosphere rich in oxygen and highly breathable; that there are no poison gases; that its natural resources are many and easy to make available to use.

Photographically, he might discover signs of civilization, of cities, of great engineering structures, of unnatural phenomena that could be attributed to artificial causes.

And, using all these observations, he would reconstruct the Earthman on theory, most likely as artist Frank R. Paul has so cleverly depicted him on the back cover this month.

Let us "quote" the Martian scientist:

The Man From Earth would be a very fortunate man, considering our own standards of existence. He has at his disposal, the richest, most livable world in the solar system.

He has an atmosphere extending anywhere from two hundred to six hundred miles in depth, with a high content of oxygen and with no poisonous gases.

He lives on a world that is three-quarters water covered, and one-quarter livable land area. He has a widely varied climate and his own choice of where he wants to live, and what type climate he prefers. But most likely, he prefers to live in the tropic zone, where nature is most luxuriant in her production of flora.

We can picture the Earthman as being quasi-amphibian, able to live on either land or water, and perhaps spending the greater portion of his time in the warm waters of his world.

Food, both of an aquatic nature, or of a vegetable nature, would be abundant, and would need no attention but would grow in a wild state in great profusion.

In the sea, fish life would provide him with food for the taking, and on land, he would need only to put forth his hand. Edible plants would literally cover the soil, and would be constantly available, due to the extremely fortuitous "seasons" caused by the planet's inclination to the plane of the ecliptic. Also, the short day, twenty-four hours, would allow for a balanced warmth from sunlight.

No doubt, he would be a lazy, good-natured fellow, lacking any inclination to combat or rivalry because plenty exists for all.

He would be a fat, contented creature, with a large body, bullet-head, short legs, and webbed hands and feet. Much of his time would be spent in eating, and his civilization would be simple. There would be no national aspects, nor any great degree of leadership. Mechanically, the Earthman would not develop very far, although from observations we have determined that he has had enough advancement to build obstructions to natural water-sheds and thus further enhance his natural resources. There is also evidence of extensive "cities," which is natural, due to the extreme numbers of the Earthmen, who would breed prolifically in such a warm, favorable climate. Thus, we can expect them to herd together in a common breeding place.

It is natural that the Earthman would lack a certain moral sense; however, due to his lack of civilization, these morals would not be intellectual, but purely animal, and perhaps the only cause of dissension on the planet.

Yet, there are certain factors which bring the Earthman occasional hardship. Due to its position in the solar system, and its extremely heavy atmosphere, there are frequent disturbances of a meteorological nature, sometimes quite violent. This results in terrific windstorms which may play havoc with the Earthman.

Also, his is a young world, and volcanic activity is still going on. He may often face eruptions of fearful violence, accompanied by severe earthquakes. Several such have been telescopically observed in past centuries. In fact, approximately 11,000 years ago, an entire continent was observed to sink into the sea in a terrible upheaval which no doubt almost destroyed the Earthman.

Yet, we of Mars can well be jealous of Earth, and its inhabitants. For a future of millions of years of plenty, full of possibility for intellectual and scientific advance as the planet grows older, is in store for her.

DISCUSSIONS

(Continued from page 142)

Your statement about an 8-foot man needing a cane doesn't cause us to support you with an agreement. The giant of Alton, who is over eight feet, does not need a cane. As for steel girders, just what do you mean by comparativly "small"?

My own experience in metals is enough to know that metal bars do bend a great deal, and an iron-ribbed skyscraper is far from rigid until all the rivets are hammered home. Yet, they certainly don't fail to support their own weight even without rivets.—Ed.

WE HAVEN'T "CONQUERED" AUSTRALIA YET!

Sirs:

The December issue of AMAZING STORIES has at last arrived. It's two weeks overdue, but I fully realize that is the result of the dislocation of shipping owing to the war, and no fault of yours. Here are my opinions of the "Bests" and "Worsts" of the year now concluded.

Cover—There have been many excellent paintings this year, but I think the free trip around the Solar System should be awarded to Mr. Fuqua for his March cover illustrating "The Raid from Mars." On the other hand, that guy who brutally mutilated the June cover with his interpretation of the surgeon of Saturn should have the thing tied around his neck as an abject warning to all S-F artists. The most disappointing cover was Mr. Morey's for "Warriors of Mars." It was not bad, mind, but far below his usual standard.

Fiction—Ugh! During 1939 your stories have degenerated lower than any other year in the history of AMAZING STORIES!!! They have become glorified fairy tales or wild west yarns!! I never thought I'd live to see the old aristocrat come to this end. (Hand the sheet 'round, Mr. Editor).

However, there have been some fair stories such as: "I Robot," "Master of Telepathy," "Marooned off Vesta" and "The Man Who Walked Through Mirrors," but even these cannot compensate for the grand old yarns in the days of yore. Remember "Spacehounds of I.P.C.", "Into the Hydrosphere", "By Jove!", "Liners of Time", "Twin World", and so many, many, many others? They were worth reading a dozen times!

Passing thought—With so many people wanting to read the light fantastic type of story, perhaps the heavier stories would not make the mag sell. Perhaps you are working to bring new readers to S-F. Perhaps getting the stories more detailed and interesting as the issues roll on. Perhaps working towards the better, greater science-fiction era that will eclipse 1930-31! If that is your object, go to it, Mr. Editor!

Back to 1939 again. Let's look at the illustrating for the interior during this period. Hmmmm, seems rather forced and unnatural to me. The artists seem to be deliberately drawing to show horrified people. Just thumb through the file copies and you will see nearly every human depicted has a look of amazement stamped upon their dials and too much unnecessary machinery is shown. Tell the lads to study Finlay and Morey for general scenes, and Wesso, Finlay, Schneeman and Paul for humans.

As for your artists, Krupa, Fuqua and McCauley deserve much praise for their work despite the errors I pointed out.

Thanks for the back covers, thanks for *Fantastic Adventures*, thanks for its "frameable" back covers, thanks for reading this far, and thanks for AMAZING!

WILLIAM D. VENEY,
19 Newland St.,
Bondi Junction,
Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

PS—Best of luck to the Chicago chaps and their convention from the members of the "Futurian Society of Sydney."

Come on, Veney, give us a break. You asked (long ago) for Morey on the covers. Then you don't like him. We tell you Fuqua is good, and you say (long ago) that he isn't. Now you rate his March '39 cover as tops. As for our stories, maybe you ARE right there. We are aiming at new readers, and maybe we'll "progress" to your "great days." Confidentially, we think we're there right now! How about these latest issues (1940)? We remember those old yarns you mention and we've even re-read them—to our sorrow. It destroyed memories. We like our present stories better. And maybe those other artists you mention are "studying" Krupa, Fuqua and McCauley.—Ed.

ATTENTION: HOY PING PONG

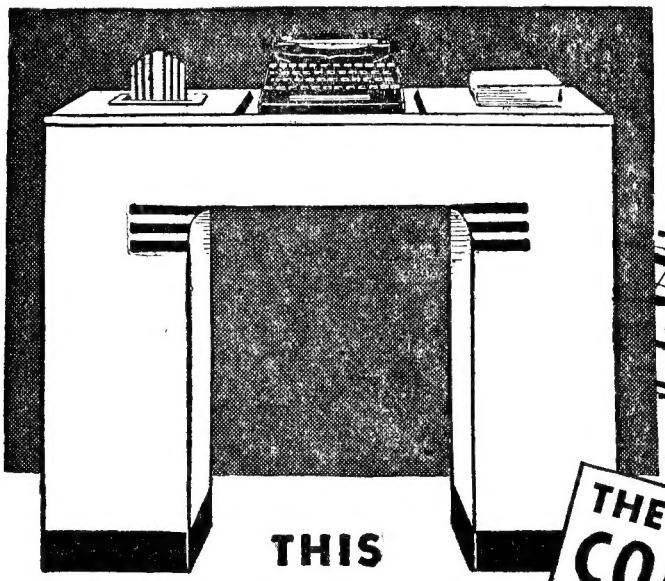
Sirs:

A few comments on AMAZING. You have working for you the three finest artists in science-fictiondom. I refer to Messrs. Paul, Krupa and Fuqua. Because my acquaintance with the work of the former goes back to the dim and hoary past, he occupies a niche in my esteem which has never yet been seriously endangered by any other illustrator. I know he's doing the back covers for FANTASTIC, but couldja stretch a point and let him do a front cover for AMAZING? If you do, wait until you get a ripsnorter of a story to illustrate, (something on which he can really exercise his imagination—I suggest a super interplanetary yarn) and then say, "Frankie, get going." It should prove to skeptical new readers that the old master has lost none of his cunning.

One thing before I close. I used to correspond with Hoy Ping Pong, but I have mislaid his address. If you see this and care to write again, Bob, I'll be glad to take up where we left off.

FRANK PINK,
51 Lower Road,
St. Mary Cray,
Kent, England.

We are planning a Paul cover in the near future.



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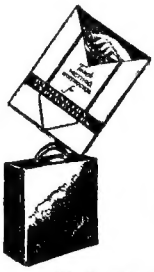

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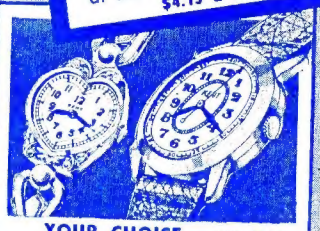

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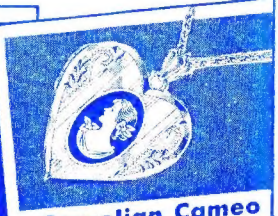

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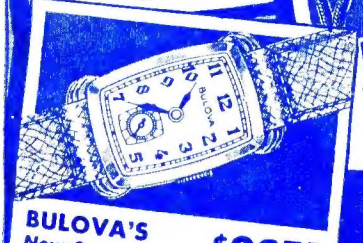

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